

Wrong Life

camnz

Harry Potter

Complete



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Summary

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Description:

Hermione wakes up in the wrong bed, with the wrong face, and with a husband that hates her.

Chapter 1

Chapter 1

The one thing Hermione had not anticipated that day was that she would die. But she realised the inescapable truth of her faith as she saw the chimney coming down on her in seemingly slow motion. It was huge. For someone who never swore, it was ironic that her last words were, “Oh Fuck.”

Being twenty eight she was just too young to die, particularly after a life that had turned out quite unsatisfactory. She was single, had a job that kept her occupied but didn’t really have the impact on the world that she wanted. Mostly she did administration. She was good at it. Everyone took her for granted.

Her relationship with Ron fizzled in a whimper. The fact that they had nothing in common just exasperated the final cruel blow; she was barren. They tried for a few years until the doctor confirmed, her womb was just for show. They cared for each other, but their relationship never had a natural flow to it. It took an exhausting amount of effort.

And the fact that Hermione was barren increasingly weighed on her. She couldn’t walk past a baby anymore with getting a lump in her throat. It hurt to go around seeing Harry and Ginny with their one and one on the way. A house full of life, instead of her relationship at home which centred around talk about either work, Quidditch or the weather. It was sucking the life out of her. They were both relieved when they decided to throw in the towel.

Then she was single for a year or so, in a world where everyone was coupled or certifiable. She’d gone on a date with a man who spent the entire evening staring at her chest. Then with one whose life’s ambition was to have a goat farm. She kind of gave up after that.

So now she was dead. This was it. Her cat would mourn her. Her parents had died in a car accident a few years back, so there wasn’t anyone family. There were her friends. They would come to her funeral, say probably heartfelt goodbyes before hugging their families closer. At best, she would serve as an example of how fleeting life was. Here one moment, gone the next.

All this she thought in the second before her world went black. Forever.

The dark was quiet, comforting and, well dark. Wasn’t there supposed to be a white light or a tunnel or something.

Instead she got some flashes of light and then a wall of pain hit her. She could feel someone giving her a potion and the pain subsided. Maybe she was alive. She would be amazed by her own body if it managed to survive that massive chimney falling on it.

The dark claimed her again.

The pain returned at some point and she groaned.

“Mistress?” A small voice said. “How are you feeling?”

She knew that voice belonged to an elf. An elf that called her Mistress. She didn't know St. Mungos used elves.

Eventually Hermione opened her eyes in a dark, large room. A designed room, much too nice for a hospital. Maybe she had been taken to some exclusive private hospital. She was a war hero after all.

An elf stood next to her bed watching her.

"Mistress?" The elf queried again.

"Please don't call me Mistress." Hermione said.

"Does your head hurt?" The elf said. "You hit your head in the bathroom yesterday."

"Did I?" Hermione said not being able to recall. Maybe she was conscious for a while after the accident and talked to this elf.

"I will give you some potion for the pain, Mis..." The woman said. "You took quite a knock on your head."

"I need to go to the toilet." Hermione said. "Where is my wand?"

"It is right her, Mis..." The elf said and pointed to the bedside table.

Hermione picked up her wand. She had a bit of double vision that didn't relent. She tried to shake her head, but it only send waves of nauseating pain through it.

The wand felt funny.

"This isn't my wand." Hermione said.

The elf took a closer look at it.

"Yes it is." The elf said eyeing her suspiciously. "Should I get the Master?"

Master, what master. The doctor? Yes she needed to speak to a Doctor. Her whole body felt funny.

"Yes, please get the Master." Hermione said and tried to stand up.

Her legs were all wobbly, but the need to go to the bathroom was pretty urgent. So she stumbled along.

What in the world was she wearing, she wondered and she made it too the toilet. She was wearing green silk. Is this common in private hospital, putting their unconscious patients in green silk camisoles? She would have to have a chat with this doctor.

As she reached for some toilet paper, her arm bumped into something soft and it took her a second to realise it was her boob. Her boob got in the way. That's weird. What? She checked under the camisole and her boob was bigger and unnaturally high. They had done something to her boobs. What kind of sick hospital would mess around with her boobs.

Now she was getting livid. She checked her arms and she was tanned too. What the hell? She stood up and walked over to the mirror to get a better look at what the hell was going on and was shocked to see someone else in the mirror.

It must be a mistake, some kind of enchanted mirror. She checked herself frantically and felt her face, which lead her to the unmistakeable conclusion that what she was seeing in the mirror matched what she was feeling. She could see her own movements in the mirror.

Then she did something she wasn't very proud of, she screamed. A girly scream, before the embarrassment took over. She fought the Dark Lord, for pete's sake. Being petrified by a change in appearance didn't deserve a scream in the scheme of things.

Someone must have used some polyjuice potion on her. Although she couldn't see why. If this was someone's idea of a practical joke, it was a good one, but she didn't know anyone that demented.

She spent a few minutes watching herself in the mirror. The face did seem somewhat familiar, but she couldn't place it. Beautiful and the body could only be describes as rocking. Tall and slim, with curves in all the right places.

She wore jewellery too, which was weird because jewellery didn't come with the polyjuice potion, someone must have put it on. There was a large emerald pendant, hanging quite lowdown on her chest, probably to draw attention to the boobs that just kind of stood up.

There were rings to, including a wedding band. Whatever was going on, they wanted her to think she was married. Seriously, did they think she was going to fall for this?

She took all the rings off in disgust, the pendant as well. Hermione didn't like jewellery, it just felt unnatural having things on her fingers.

She was really tall and Hermione considered how high she could reach. Her legs were really long too. Slim, shapely and tanned like she'd been on holiday for a couple of weeks.

Eventually she got bored with the new body and decided it was time to find out what was going on. She walked back into the large room she had woken up in. On second thought, this looked nothing like a hospital room. There was a huge wardrobe, which she found was stuffed full of clothes. Expensive clothes. No jeans or T-shirts. Nothing terribly comfortable.

She had to settle on a black skirt and a jewel-tone yellow blouse. Silk, she determined. It felt cool and buttery when she slid it on. Hermione had never had any silk clothes. The feel of the material was kind of sexy, but she dismissed it out of her mind. She had much bigger things to think about, like what the hell was going on.

Every single pair of shoes had a heel on it. Hermione only wore heels for special occasions which were fairly rare in her life, particularly so since she broke up with Ron.

The faint pop made her turn to see the elf was back.

"Master says if you need medical attention, you should owl for a doctor." The elf said.

"Where is the Master?" Hermione asked.

"He is in the Breakfast room, Mistress." The elf said with a bow.

Right, Hermione thought, time to go give this person a piece of her mind. She marched out of the room only to be hit by the thought that she had no idea where this breakfast room was. She walked more tentatively down the hall until she hit a staircase. This was a house and it

was luxuriously furnished. Dark, shining wood. Think carpets. A massive chandelier hung over the stair case.

She had to try a few of the rooms outside until eventually she got far enough that she could smell food. The food made her feel nauseous and it reminded her of the horrible headache she had. She ignored it and marched towards the room. Each step made her head throb.

She burst through the door, ready to have a go at whoever, whatever was going on. But what she saw when she got through made her pause. Unmistakably, Draco Malfoy was sitting at the table reading a paper.

“Malfoy?” She asked. Her mind whirring with thoughts, none of which made sense.

“Astoria.” He said coolly without looking up.

Astoria, she repeated in her mind. Then she fainted.

Chapter 2

Chapter 2

“Mrs. Malfoy?” Hermione heard a man saying. She wondered where the hell she was, obviously somewhere where Mrs. Malfoy was. She felt groggy. Maybe she was dreaming.

“Mrs. Malfoy?” The voice said again. “How are you feeling?”

She tried to speak but her throat was dry resulting in more of a croak. A cup of water was at her lips and she took a sip.

“Can you hear me?” The voice said. Hermione ignored it, he was obviously speaking to Narcissa Malfoy. Which seemed very odd. So she opened her eyes.

“There.” The man said looking down at her. “How are you feeling Mrs. Malfoy?”

He was looking at her.

“No, I’m Hermione, you have the wrong person.”

“You’ve taken quite a knock on your head.” He said after a while. “Can you remember what happened to you?”

“A chimney fell on me.”

“Well, I can imagine it might feel like it.” The man said, a medi-wizard, “I have given you some potions to help with the concussion. You should start to feel better now. You should be fine, but take it easy for a few days. Perhaps best to stay in bed today. You should feel better tomorrow.”

Hermione didn’t bother arguing, what did it matter if this man was confused about who she was. Obviously not someone who was linked with this community, because she looked nothing like Narcissa Malfoy. Hermione went back to sleep.

She woke up later in a strange room, a dark room. A room that looked familiar, then she realised it looked like the room in the bizarre dream she had. No, no, no, no, no, she repeated to herself as she ran into the bathroom. The image revealed the tall, beautiful woman that was Astoria Greengrass, no Astoria Malfoy. In other words, Mrs. Malfoy.

Why, why, why couldn’t she just wake up in her own bed. She would wake up, take a sick day and just be at home, but no, some sick practical joke she had to deal with. Or maybe the chimney really did hit her, maybe this was hell. Maybe she did something really bad and her eternal punishment was to be married to Draco Malfoy.

Hermione sunk down on the bathroom floor and cried. It had been an emotional couple of days and now she might be dead. That warranted a bit of a cry.

A pop told her that she wasn’t alone. Scuttling little feet came towards the door and knocked.

“Mistress?” The little voice said.

“I’m not your Mistress!” She said, but regretted it as she heard the fearful squeak from the elf.

“I have brought your dinner.” The elf said.

“Thank you.” Hermione said, trying to make up for the fact that she scared the little creature. “I am very grateful.”

She chided herself for being cruel to an elf. Nothing justified it. And she was really hungry.

A tray sat on the table next to the bed. It smelled absolutely divine and she was hungry to the point where she didn’t care if it was poisoned or laced with polyjuice potion, or whatever. Right now she needed to eat and she would deal with whatever was going on with a full stomach.

But a full stomach only made her sleepy and she kind of just flopped back on the bed. It was only supposed to be for a little nap, but she woke up again as dawn was breaking. One of those sleeps where she closed her eyes one second and opened them again a second later, that was actually ten hours later.

Her head felt better today. She checked her hand first thing and confirmed that she was still looking like Astoria Malfoy. They must be feeding her Polyjuice potion when she was sleeping, and maybe in the food.

She got dressed, again in ridiculously fine clothes for first thing in the morning. She had to wear heels, when normally she’d be in her slippers and dressing gown.

She marched down to the breakfast room where’d she’d found Malfoy before, but he wasn’t there. He must not be up yet. Actually, where was her wand? She should be having this confrontation with her wand in hand. She went back upstairs and search for the wand. She found it on her dressing table. Well, not her wand, Astoria’s wand.

If she had Astoria’s wand, where was Astoria?

By the time she got back downstairs, Malfoy was sitting in the same place he was before, reading the paper.

“What the hell is going on, Malfoy?” She demanded.

“Astoria.” He said coolly. ‘I have no idea what you are referring to.’ He said and finally looked at her. “You’ve forgotten to do your hair.”

“Screw my hair, Malfoy.” She yelled. “What have you done?”

“You’re not in your right mind, *dear*.” He said. “The medi-wizard said you were a bit confused, but that it was understandable considering your injury. Apparently you will come right.”

“Right.” She repeated. “You call this right? What kind of sick and twisted game are you playing?”

“Perhaps you need to go lay down again.” He said through gritted teeth.

Hermione narrowed her eyes, he was playing along with whatever game he had devised. Then she saw her face on the front page of the Daily Prophet.

‘War Hero Dead’ the headline said.

‘I’m dead?’ Hermione yelled and ripped the paper out of Draco’s hands.

Her heart started beating as she looked at the article. There was a photo of her on the front page, from her 25th birthday. She was smiling and laughing. It was probably the nicest photo the Prophet had ever printed of her, usually they hung out for the most unflattering stances and facial expressions. But this was nice. Her surrounded by her friends, having a good time. She’d still not known she was barren then. The whole world had possibilities.

But this must be some kind of set up. Malfoy must have had it printed just to confuse her.

“Nice try.” She said and threw the paper at him. She marched out of the room. Continued out and apparated away. She was surprised that it worked, but arrived at her flat without any incident.

She would have expected Malfoy to force her to stay, but there was nothing barring her from apparating away.

There was nothing out of order in her flat. Mail on the floor, including a copy of the Daily Prophet with the same article. No, just a very elaborate practical joke. So she apparated to Diagon Alley, where she saw several more copies, all the same with her smiling face on the front.

She picked up one of the articles and read. It said a terrible accident had occurred during the renovation of the Sanderson’s home, when a chimney dislodged and crushed the respected war hero. Her body had been taken to the morgue at St. Mungo’s in preparation for a funeral on Saturday. It said, she was muggleborn, but as she had no muggle family left, she would have a funeral in the magical community.

Ok, she was starting to get worried now. It could still be a very elaborate joke.

She apparated back to her flat and was confronted by the sight of Ron hugging his girlfriend, sorry fiancée. He was crying and looked up at he saw her.

“Astoria Malfoy?” He said incredulously as he was her. “What are you doing here?”

“I..” She started. “Ron, this really weird thing...”

“I think you should leave.” He said with hostility and he came up and slammed the door in her face.

Hermione knew there was no talking to him when he was in a state. Maybe she should try Harry. Obviously they were all unaware that this was a practical joke. A very cruel joke.

The one thing they could not replicate was a body that looked like her. Polyjuice potion didn’t work in death. The article said she was at the morgue, so prove it, she thought to herself.

The morgue was in the basement, a sterile and unpleasant place. She’d been there before, after the war. She hated it.

She demanded to see Hermione Granger's body and when asked if she was family, she said she was her cousin Sarah Granger. Sarah Granger was a muggle cousin who lived in Canada, but no one need know that.

The man told her to sit down, while he prepared a viewing. He was very sombre and reverent. Hermione guessed that was part of the job.

After about ten minutes, he came out and said that all was ready. Hermione walked into a room where a body was covered by a sheet.

"There was a bit of damage." He said. "We had to do a bit of reconstruction."

Hermione didn't want to know what that meant. She was pretty sure the body under the sheet wasn't her. But she gasped with shock when the man turned the sheet down. It was her without a doubt. That was her body.

She looked at it closely making sure it wasn't some kind of representation. It would be a massive game if the morgue was in on it too. But that was her body. She could even see the scar from when she was eight and fell off her bike.

She was starting to hyperventilate, which was obviously not unexpected by the morgue attendant because he led her out. Hermione felt wrong about moving away from her body, but the man was pretty insistent.

He sat her down and gave her a cup of water.

"It can be pretty shocking." He said quietly. "Many don't react well."

Really, she screamed in her head, people don't react well to seeing their bodies in the morgue.

She had to get out of there and she ran from the man and the morgue. She was so completely confused. She walked around Diagon Alley for a couple of hours trying to get everything straight in her head. The pieces just didn't fit. In the end her head hurt, her body ached and she was starving again.

Ron was in her flat. She had nowhere else to go. She had no money, there was nothing to do other than to return to Malfoy Manor. Any answered would be there.

She floo'd there and stepped out of the fireplace in the enormous hall.

"Where have you been?" She heard a tense voice across the hall.

"To diagon alley." She said.

"Without your purse." Malfoy said suspiciously.

"Leave me alone." Hermione yelled at him.

He raised an eyebrow on that cold, tense aristocratic face.

"You're a whore, Astoria." He said coldly. "But you've made your bed, now you're going to sleep in it, I'm afraid. I think you should stay here for a while, learn what it means to be a Malfoy. You are obviously having trouble understanding the concept."

Chapter 3

Chapter 3

"You must get dressed." The elf was telling her. "Dinner is in half an hour."

"I'm not going." She said sitting in the room she had woken up in this morning. Astoria's room.

"Master will not be pleased." The elf said, obviously not looking forward to informing the master of her decision.

"Well, he can just get over it." She said, then felt bad for the elf. "Tell him I have a headache and have retired."

The elf bowed and popped away. She certainly wasn't going to have dinner with him. This whole situation was just ridiculous and she needed to think.

The elf eventually came back with some food, which she wasn't all that interested in. She did feel quite drained. Which she figured was normal after seeing one's body in the morgue.

What did this mean, she wondered to herself. Eventually she concluded that this must be Astoria's body. So where was Astoria?

Her thoughts were running around in circles. She didn't even hear him come in the room.

"You are expected to be at dinner, Astoria." He said coldly.

"I'm not feeling well." She said.

"I don't care. If you're bleeding to death, you will still come down to dinner." Draco said. "You will do your part as my wife and you will do it well. Tomorrow night, we are going to the Parkinsons and you will go and be a dutiful wife." He said while walking around the room.

"I'm not your wife." She said. "There has been some kind of mix up. I'm Hermione Granger. I don't know what happened."

"Well, Astoria." He stressed. "I don't care if you think your Genghis Khan, you are not getting out of your duties."

He walked into the bathroom, then returned and strode towards her. He took hold of her hand and shoved her wedding band on, then another ring with some kind of milky opal on it.

"You may not take these off." He ordered harshly. "The doctor said you were suffering from delusions. They will pass, in the meantime, you will behave yourself."

"Or what?" Hermione challenged getting annoyed with his heavy handedness.

"Or I am going to make your life hell." He said sharply and grabbed her chin and held it tightly.

Hermione struggled again the hold.

"Marrying into this family means more than shopping and parties. It comes with duties. I thought you understood that." He said coldly. "If you haven't understood that so far, you will learn so now."

Hermione was starting to get a twinge of worry, but he released her and turned towards the door.

"I think you need to stay at home tomorrow." He said.

"I have things to do." She shouted.

"Not if I tell you to stay at home." He said. "Duty remember."

Duty isn't bending to your whims, she wanted to shout after him, but she didn't want to extend this conversation. He was going to make her life hell was he, somehow she thought that Astoria already was in hell. Poor Astoria.

His visit had made her angry. The wedding band sat around her finger like burning ring of coal. She took it off and threw it into a corner of the room. Like she would ever be married to him.

Anger made her hungry and she demolished the cooling dinner. Once the anger subsided, her body practically shut down.

Hermione had all manners of weird dreams, and woke with a start in the morning. She had no idea where she was and it took her a few moments to remember her shocking circumstances. And the conversation with Draco last night.

He didn't believe her when she said she was Hermione Granger. He thought, the doctor told him, that she was delusional. However much she argued, he would still believe she was delusional because of a knock on her head.

Maybe she could convince him, tell him things only Hermione Granger would know, but as she considered it, she didn't know him well enough. What was she going to say, he was a prat beyond comparison. But that was common knowledge, as was pretty much everything she knew about him. They just didn't share that kind of history.

She did with Harry, but Harry would be suspicious. He would assume that Astoria had done legimency on her, pulled out her memories to use against him. Sometimes magic just got in the way. She would have to think of a way to get people to believe her.

A pop told her the elf was there.

"Mistress must get ready for breakfast." The elf said quietly.

Hermione rolled her eyes, but she had a pretty strong suspicion that Draco would come up to give her one of his little pep talks if she didn't come down. She decided it was just easier to go down. She wasn't going to challenge like a petulant child. Until she figured out what was going on and how to get out of it, she would just go along with the routine.

She wanted to not comply when the elf handed her the wedding band, but she took it and put it on. Someone is going to pay for this, she told herself.

Draco didn't look as she entered, as he kept on reading the paper. Unfortunately there were two sets of papers. Hermione could have cursed out loud. Who else would have been at breakfast at Malfoy Manor.

Oh, just the man who tried to kill her, then watched over her torture in one of the rooms here somewhere. Hermione felt the uncomfortable, clammy feeling of a cold sweat coming on. But she took her plate and scooped some eggs from the buffet serving table.

As she sat down, Narcissa Malfoy swept into the room. Once Narcissa was settled, her and Lucius started co-ordinating their day. Actually it was mostly Narcissa who talked, Lucius would affirm along the way.

"And what have you planned today Astoria?" The other woman asked.

"Astoria is staying at home for a while." Draco answered for her. "She needs to recover from her fall the other day."

Hermione bristled at having him speak for her.

"That is a wonderful idea." Narcissa said. "Some peace and quiet will give you some time to reflect."

Reflect on what, Hermione wanted to ask, but it would have been rude. With that, the conversation moved onto recent gossip. Again, it was Narcissa that was talking and it didn't seem to matter that no one else was participating.

Apparently a Mrs. Marchmand had been left practically penniless after her husband had died with massive amounts of debt. The poor woman only had her family property left. A measly London town house and a tiny property in Italy. Wasn't it shocking. And poor Robilliards had lost another baby.

Lucius excused himself and Draco soon followed. Hermione was left in the room with Narcissa Malfoy and an awkward silence followed. After a few minutes of silence, Hermione excused herself and left.

Hermione was going to do what she always did when stuck in a bad situation, she researched. The Malfoy library was legendary. She'd always thought she'd never get a chance to see it, but now it was there and waiting for her and it was huge. Hermione gasped as she walked into the large room, covered with books from ceiling to floor.

She started to lightly peruse the shelves. It would take her years to go through the library. There were lots of titles she didn't know from what she could see. Titles that would have been restricted in the Hogwarts library. The ministry had gone through Malfoy Manor many times after the war finished, but Hermione was pretty sure that the Malfoys had objectionable material elsewhere. Books that were probably illegal. Books all about doing horrible things to other people.

Hermione wasn't interested in the Dark Arts, in the end it was just about doing awful things to other people. It had none of the beauty and joy that magic contained. It was just ugly.

She searched for most of the day, but couldn't find anything about her predicament. There were a few spells about allowing people to see and move other people's bodies, like a variant

of the Imperio curse. But it was always a cast spell. The Imperio curse, no matter its variant, didn't happen by accident. And it certainly wasn't done by someone outside of their own body.

Hermione massaged her temples. The sun was starting to set outside and she had a pretty significant tension headache, plus an empty belly as she worked straight through lunch.

She groaned as she remembered the dinner she was having with the Parkinsons. She had to go be a 'dutiful wife' as Draco had called. Draco's dutiful wife, which was somewhere between being ludicrous to being downright revolting.

The elf was waiting impatiently when she got back to her room. Hermione picked a dress, but the elf distress only increased with her selection. In the end, she let the elf choose a dress, which was black and silver. It fit her perfectly, showed off Astoria's curves while not being slutty. It was still something that had no place whatsoever in Hermione's closet.

Hermione hated it, it made her feel exposed. The elf made her sit down while it brushed her hair. Hermione lack of interest seemed to give the elf free rein, but she stopped it when it tried to apply make up. And she stopped it again as it tried to adorn her with jewellery. There was only so far she would go with playing along.

"You must mistress." The elf whined. "It will reflect badly on the master."

Hermione was annoyed, but let it. She could imagine that a lack of jewellery in the pureblood world might mean something, where showing off ones wealth was expected. She thought it was shallow and pathetic, but she was now at the centre of shallow and pathetic. Welcome to Shallowville, she said to herself.

Actually, she looked stunning. Astoria looked stunning. She could see why Draco had married her. Draco would be attracted to that sort of thing. All Hermione remembered of Astoria was that she was kind of thick. They weren't in the same year, but Astoria was not the kind of girl one would see in the library. Maybe not thick as much, grossly disinterested academically might have been closer to the truth.

Few of the elite pureblood girls applied themselves academically, why would they, they were only going to marry anyway. Their only purpose in life was to be someone's wife. The thought made Hermione want to throw up. It was so much better being a half blood, or even a muggleborn. As much as they looked down on her, she had all the choices in the world.

Although it had only got her a dead end job and alone in a one bedroom flat. Sometimes she wondered if things would have gone better for her if she had been a half blood. The prejudice against her kind was still deep rooted and pervasive.

The idea that she was going into the elitist pureblood society tonight was kind of funny. Someone they would never accept into their mist. And she would be escorted there by the biggest elitist of them all, Draco effin Malfoy.

"Mistress must go now." The elf said. It almost shooed her out of the room.

They were all waiting in the hall. Hermione still got an adrenalin rush every time she was Lucius Malfoy. Her subconscious still treated him like an enemy.

They all looked very smart. Just a little bit fancier than their standard smart dress. She guessed they had all sorts of nuances on smartness. This was not ball smartness, just a level less. Draco did look good in dress robes. He always had. It was something Hermione had grudgingly admitted over the years.

“We are ready to go.” Lucius said when she joined the group. Narcissa took his arm and he apparated, leaving just her and Draco.

“Now behave.” He said.

“I’m not a child.” Hermione said back and he took her arm and side along apparated them. Hermione didn’t know if it was the apparation or the company that made her want to throw up.

When they got to the other side, they were at the Parkinsons’. The whole house was lit up with candles giving it a golden glow. There was music and the constant drone of conversation. Hermione stepped away, but Draco grabbed her hip and pulled her back.

“Dutiful wife.” He warned darkly.

She suffered through the whole evening at Draco’s side. His hand was burning her lower back throughout the evening, making her feel extremely uncomfortable. She had actually never been this close to Malfoy before. Draco talked to an endless number of people. He was charming, well spoken and even funny in a very dry way. It was almost fascinating watching a toned down version of the strip the walls highly focused wit that she typically got from him.

His charm would completely disappear when there was no one there to see it, and he would revert back to his cold harsh self, until a new audience appeared. Hermione spend the evening focusing on the finger foods that was being passed around.

Sometimes she would see Pansy sending evil looks at her across the room. Hermione would think that Pansy had realised there was a mudblood at her parents’ party, but Draco still kept in hand on her back like a tether. Draco wouldn’t touch her for a second if he actually thought she was anything other than his deluded wife.

Or if he had set this all up, somehow, why? It didn’t even make sense that he would want to drag a mudblood around a party. If this was some kind of ploy involving exposing her in front of all his peers, he would have done it by now. Unless this was a practical joke on him. And where the hell was Astoria?

Chapter 4

Chapter 4

Hermione actually sulked the next day. She couldn't believe everything had gone so wrong. And the worst was that they had to go around to the Greengrass' for dinner. Obviously the game would be up then, having dinner with Astoria's family would be a disaster. It would take Hermione's parents less than five minutes to establish there was something very wrong if someone came home in her body.

It could be worse though, everyone seemed to pretty much leave her alone. Breakfast was quiet and awkward, with Narcissa chattering about the gossip. And pureblood gossip was pretty brutal. Draco did not participate in the gossip to the degree that she would have thought. Having been so glad with other's misfortune during school, she would have thought he'd be rolling around on the floor with laughter.

Although saying that, she hadn't seen him in years. Only in passing from a distance. She had pretty much looked the other way whenever he was anywhere in sight. He was definitely older now, lost a bit of the youthfulness. Much more serious looking than the spoilt brat she'd known. She would be lying if she said he wasn't attractive if you were into that kind of attractiveness. The cold, forbidding and angry version.

Lucius and Narcissa looked exactly the same as they always had. Still absolutely convinced of their superiority and entitlement. Narcissa was apparently having lunch at some exclusive club with some woman called Celeste. The men gave no indication of what they'd be doing that day. Probably dreaming about their muggle baiting days, Hermione thought.

In fact, she had no idea what Draco did. He seemed to leave the house each morning, but he came and went. He must not have a normal full time job. Maybe he didn't work at all.

After laying on her bed staring at the ceiling for hours, Hermione had to get up and go to the library. It just wasn't alright with her to lay there doing nothing. So she kept on researching, getting nowhere really.

She still wished every night that she would wake up in her own body the next day and this had just been a bad dream.

Somehow the day passed and the little elf, who's name was Red, came to warn her that she needed to get ready for dinner. Odd name for an elf, but everything about these people were odd. There was nothing cosy about this mansion. It was cold and drafty, dark and generally uninviting. She hated it. It was filled with some interesting object. She hadn't had time to check them out yet, maybe she would have a closer look tomorrow.

She wore green and purple robes. Quite a heavy set, it fit perfectly.

Again the Malfoy's were waiting when she made it downstairs.

"I wish we didn't have to end up waiting for you all the time." Narcissa said.

“I am right on time.” Hermione said checking her watch.

Narcissa gave a light little snort and turned towards her husband who would side along apparate her. Why did they always side along apparate? Why not just go themselves. Hermione was kind of grateful because she didn’t know where to go, which would be very odd considering she was going to the house where she supposedly ‘grew up’.

Draco waited for her to take his arm. He was holding it out without looking at her. This was obviously the etiquette. In fact, he had not said a single word to her all day. Which considering was not a bad thing, but it made her wonder if this frosty relationship between husband and wife was normal or whether there was something not right in their marriage.

It was very odd to touch Draco Malfoy on purpose. He was much warmer than she would have expected, like there was a human being underneath all that snarling and unpleasantness. The apparition jerked her through the stomach. She hated it, it was fast, but really, sometimes she wondered if muggle travel was just a little bit more dignified even though it took much longer.

The Greengrass’ house was on a smaller scale, but just as unwelcoming. She wondered if any of these people had even had a cup of coco in their lives.

Mrs. Greengrass air kissed her and called her darling after greeting all the Malfoys first. It shocked Hermione a bit. Certainly more detached than she would get at home. With a twinge, she missed her parents.

They sat down in a little sitting area where two elves were taking drinks orders. Mrs. Greengrass was very beautiful, but heavily made up. She made an effort, which was something Mr. Greengrass seemed to have let go off a while back. He had a large belly which signified that there were several things in this world that he loved a lot. His daughter might not have been that high on the list because he just grunted slightly as she walked past.

Daphne Greengrass, sorry Humphrey walked in next with her husband. Mrs. Greengrass air kissed her other daughter as well. Daphne didn’t look much different from when she was in school, although less the school uniform. Hermione didn’t know her husband.

“You recall my daughter Daphne.” Mrs. Greengrass said. “Just gave birth to a son two months back.”

“Congratulations.” Lucius offered. Hermione looked around, really, they didn’t know that the sister in law had a baby? Daphne sat down and an elf tended to her.

“Still not pregnant yet?” Mrs. Greengrass asked or maybe stated. It took Hermione a second to realise it was her she was referring to, causing Hermione to cough into her drink. ‘I just don’t understand why she hasn’t produced an heir yet.’ Mrs. Greengrass spoke to Lucius and Narcissa. “It must be just wilfulness. We tried to force it out of her, but..”

“We had them both checked thoroughly.” She continued while Hermione felt her cheeks start to flame. Technically they were talking about Astoria, but still, this was mortifying. ‘The doctors were adamant that she could conceive.’ The woman spoke apologetically like she had sold a lame horse. “Although it seems that Daphne would have been a better choice, in hindsight.”

Hermione didn't know what to do with herself. No one else seemed to be embarrassed about this situation. Draco was just casually sitting there next to her, sipping his drink as he half listened to the conversation. Lucius and Narcissa didn't react either, like the statement was along their thinking and perfectly acceptable for company. Maybe that was the etiquette in pureblood society, sell your daughters as broodmares and then apologise if they didn't produce quickly enough.

For the first time ever, Hermione felt sorry for Astoria Greengrass. She wanted to hit Draco for not defending her. It must be his fault, she was capable according to the medical establishment, he probably wasn't and really, he is so revolting Astoria probably couldn't bare having him near her.

And then Daphne was giving her the most smug look. Hermione couldn't believe that this was Astoria's family. Hermione didn't like any of them and couldn't believe they were treating their own like this. It made her wonder, maybe it was just her receiving their crap because she was muggleborn, maybe this is how they were period. Underneath all that snobbishness and sophistication, they were just savages. Well she had always known that Draco was vicious, but she had thought that was reserved for people he thought were lower than him in his twisted societal tally.

"They are still young. There is plenty of time." Narcissa said. It wasn't a defence of her, but a polite end to the conversation. Hermione felt sick. She did not want to spend the evening with these people.

Secretly she had always wondered what it would be like on the inside, but right now, she couldn't care less, she wanted away from these people. Would they even care if they knew their daughter was probably dead?

Hermione excused herself and went to the bathroom. She needed a moment to herself. Actually she needed some excuse to get away from here, but she couldn't think of anything. Maybe she should just walk out, but then she would probably get another encouraging talk from Draco, maybe something along the lines of what a whore she was, like last time.

Daphne walked into the bathroom. Hermione didn't know what to do. She had no idea what to expect from Daphne, Hermione wasn't all that sure of the relationship between sisters. She only really knew Parvati and Padma, and they seemed to fight more than anything. Daphne seemed to settle on the wall, looking at her.

"How is your little boy?" Hermione started.

"He is fine." Daphne said, slightly bored. Hermione nodded, not sure what else to say.

"He must keep you up all night." Hermione continued as the silence kept going. Babies was a topic that Hermione had spent a lot of thought on over the last couple of years.

"Not really." Daphne said. Hermione realised there must have been someone else who took care of the child at night.

What do you want, Hermione wanted to ask as Daphne lingered.

"You going to the Zabini's house this summer?" Daphne asked.

“I am not sure what the plans are.” Hermione said, not even knowing what Daphne was referring to.

Whatever Hermione said, it seemed to upset Daphne.

“Just because you’re rich, doesn’t mean you can do whatever you want.” She snapped before storming out.

What the hell was that, Hermione wondered. She really did have a massive headache now.

She was about to excuse herself with this convenient headache when she got back to the group, when she was being herded into the dining room. Draco’s hand was firm on her back guiding her. She hated it when he touched her.

Another evening in polite society stretch before Hermione and she wondered jokingly if maybe Astoria had gotten the better bargain. No, seriously, it was good to be alive, Hermione thought. If she could only extricate herself from this situation. Pureblood wizards did not divorce, Hermione thought as she sat across the table from Draco.

She didn’t think he was particularly enjoying the evening either. The conversation centred mainly around politics and who was in office and who was angling for power within the Ministry. This was the pureblood male version of gossip, while the women sat by and listened. Draco would say something every once in a while. He was paying attention to the conversation. He paid none to her.

The evening mercifully finished as soon as desert was done. The Malfoys didn’t seem to want to linger after, which was heaven sent as far as Hermione was concerned.

She was astonished that no one had even gotten suspicious at her this evening. Invasion of the body snatchers had happened in their family and no one noticed.

Chapter 5

Chapter 5

Hermione spent the next few days researching. She didn't really see anyone other than at breakfast and dinner. Everyone pretty much ignored her, which was fine by her. She wondered repeatedly whether she should try to approach Harry, but knew it would get really messy. He would not believe her and she wasn't sure that she could convince him that it was really her and not Astoria trying to deceive him with stolen memories.

She did feel really sorry for Astoria, being in this situation. Draco obviously didn't pay her any attention and her family was just atrocious. It just made her sick thinking about pureblood and their ways. What made it worse was that there was a party on tonight at the Flints'. She tried to excuse herself, but it was obviously out of the question. Another dress up, boring party. Is that all they did with their lives?

Hermione hated dressing up, she let Red choose her robes, do her hair. She even let the tiny elf put on a little bit of make up as it seemed to get really agitated when she refused. As per usual, they were waiting for her downstairs. Narcissa gave her a dirty look again even though she was right on the agreed time. These people just couldn't wait to get to a party, she thought bitterly to herself as she grabbed Malfoy's arm.

Again, Draco seemed to come alive at the party. She had seen it before, but she was amazed how funny and charming he could be when he tried. The party was a boring blur. Hermione smiled and nodded in the right places. She spent most of the night wondering what the alternative would be, what the fall out would be if she refused to go.

Draco hardly spoke to her and then he excused himself for a while as he needed to speak to a group of men. Hermione wandered, checking out the ancestral Flints on the walls who were obviously excited about the party. The Flints' house was a bit more modern than the Malfoys'. Must have been built in the last 300 years as opposed to the Malfoys' which must have been built in the middle ages if not before.

She decided to seek out the ladies, but was having a bit of trouble finding it. She ended up in some kind of drawing room on her fourth attempt and she practically growled with frustration.

She let out a squeak of shock when someone wound their arms around her from behind. It happened so fast, she didn't have time to react as the hands moved up and cupped her breasts. Sorry Astoria's breasts. Someone was kissing her neck and grinding themselves into her backside.

Her immediate thought that maybe Draco had some bizarre amorous habits at other peoples houses, but as she forcefully shimmied out of the restraining arms she saw that it wasn't him. It was Theo Nott. And her shock gave him the chance to draw her close again. Now they were face to face.

"Come on, baby." He said in a low husky voice. "I've missed you like crazy."

What? No, yuck.

“Let go of me, Nott.” She said.

“What’s the matter?” He asked with obvious confusion.

“What are you doing?” Hermione continued, trying to get a grapple of the situation. Was this normal? Was she being attacked or was this supposed to happen?

“What is wrong with you?”

“I am married.” She said. It was the line she used whenever some stranger got the wrong idea.

Theo gave her a look like she was mad.

“Don’t touch me.” Hermione said and walked off. She wouldn’t quite turn her back on him as she left the room. Nott was still watching her like she had lost her mind.

Hermione ran back to where people were, she really needed a toilet, but she didn’t want to risk being on her own again. She felt a bit nauseous as she realised that Astoria and Theo Nott were lovers. Although on second thought, she didn’t care. A bit torn between feeling sorry for Draco and thinking it was just what he deserved.

Astoria was doing the dirty on him. The part of her whose nemeses was Draco Malfoy couldn’t have been happier, but the grown up part thought it was kind of juvenile to wish him harm, it made her no better than him. Alright, she would indulge her juvenile side for a moment as she indulged in a moment of joy at his misfortune.

The nemeses then turned up next to her.

“I don’t like it when you wonder off.” He said and his hand was right on the small of her back again, where he constantly kept it.

“I had to go to the toilet.” She said. So he didn’t like it when she wondered off, huh. Maybe he had an idea of what Astoria did when she wondered off. Now she felt bad for indulging in her juvenile sentiments.

He had been looking for her. She wondered if he would have gone looking for her in the other rooms. She guessed it was possibility that he had found Astoria and Nott in some similar situation in the past. So far, she’d never really known him to seek Astoria out in any other capacity.

He wasn’t happy. She could see the muscles in his jaw clenching, but eventually it was replaced with the show as he charmed someone or other.

She kind of felt bad for him, having such a bad marriage. Her relationship with Ron had ended badly and it was misery. Draco was stuck in this marriage. Divorce was not an option for him. He, like most purebloods would suffer through their marriages until one of them died. Which did result in there being a higher than normal occurrence of spousal murders in the pureblood society. Azkaban held a few people who preferred its cold peace over their spouses aggravating company.

She'd never quite realised that anything could go seriously wrong in Malfoy's life. He always had everything handed to him, everything was fixed with money or influence. But he lived in this stifling society, with a marriage that was obviously barely functioning.

She had hated being alone in her tiny little apartment and dead end job, if she would ever acknowledge it, but this was probably worse. She'd still have potential for anything, but he was stuck in this, forever. The juvenile part of her hated that she felt sorry for him.

It made her mind less that she was being dragged along to these events to be his wife-accessory, at least for tonight. She still needed to find some way to fix all this. In the meantime she would try to just tolerate the situation she was in.

She spent the rest of the night watching him. He was tall like Ron, but that is pretty much where the similarities ended. Ron, while it was good, had been a warm snugly blanket. Draco wasn't. She wasn't sure what Draco was, but it wasn't comfort. He was about challenge. He was so keenly observant. He could read any weakness in her, no matter how hard she tried to conceal it. He knew just how to hurt her. Ron hurt her often, but it was never on purpose, he just couldn't read her at all.

It still really hurt that they didn't survive their, her barrenness. It still drained all the joy out of the world whenever she thought about it.

"Try not to look so disappointed." Draco said coldly. Hermione was sure that statement had a double meaning, but she couldn't be bothered getting into it.

"Sorry." She said. "I was a million miles away."

"Is that so." He said dryly.

"I was thinking about Ron Weasley."

He froze slightly. Not a statement he was expecting, she decided.

"Well, the general sense of disappointment is obvious then." He said.

Ok, that was kind of funny in a very wicked way and Hermione suppressed a hint of a smile.

"I forgot, you are under the impression that you are Granger." He said.

"I am Hermione Granger." She stated.

"Did you ever meet her?" Draco said. "Nothing about you is like Granger. You should have chosen someone a little more credible, Astoria."

"Credible?" She said. "What do you mean credible?" In what way was she not credible in Draco Malfoy's eyes.

He ignored her. Her time of feeling sorry for Malfoy was definitely over. Effin arsehole.

Luckily the evening was over and Draco left her as soon as he had apparated her back to the mansion. Obviously the evening wasn't over for him.

Hermione didn't see him the next morning, which was just fine. She was still stinging from the 'not credible' statement, whatever that meant.

But they didn't speak again for the next few days. Good, she thought.

Then he entered her room one night.

"Don't you knock?" She stated annoyed. She could have been in the shower or something.

He didn't answer, but walked across the room with a drink in his hand. He put it down on a dress and began to undo his cufflinks. Hermione had no idea what was going on, but gasped when he started on the buttons of his shirt.

"What are you doing?" She snapped. He turned to look at her.

"Its time."

"Time?"

"You're ovulating."

She gasped. He was...he was expecting... Hell no!

"No way." She said, but he continued to pull his shirt out of his pants. "Absolutely not!"

"This is your one and only duty, Astoria."

"I'm not Astoria." She said. "I'm not your wife. I'm Hermione. This is completely out of the question."

"You can call yourself the Queen of Sheeba for all I care, Astoria. The only thing you need to do in life is to produce an heir, it is your duty, like it is every month."

Hermione was completely panicking. This could absolutely not happen. She looked for an exit.

"Don't make this difficult, Astoria." He said and locked the door with his wand.

What, was he going to force her, she thought. Hermione felt adrenalin coursing through her, making her shaky.

"But I have a concussion." She said, grappling for straws, wondering if she could climb out the window. Her wand was in the bathroom, damn it, she thought to herself. "The doctor said, I need to take it easy."

Draco was looking at her with suspicion.

"I can't be shaken about." She said trying to make a logical argument while in full panic. "Otherwise this damage might get worse or be permanent. And then you might get stuck with a wife who thinks she is Hermione Granger forever."

He watched her for a while.

"Fine." He said. "But only thing month, Astoria. I won't tolerate you trying to weasel your way out. I am serious Astoria, you made your bed, now you have to sleep in it. Literally."

He strode out of the room and Hermione shook like a leaf. More from the adrenalin than actual fear. She wasn't afraid of him, as if, more like disgusted. This was a consequence of her predicament she hadn't actually realised. She was his god damned wife, and he had certain rights. Rights he could demand, through court order if required. Crap, crap, crap.

She had to resort to having a drink of her own just to calm her nerves down. She would not be able to sleep tonight. He said this month. So that meant she had until next time she was ovulating. She couldn't believe he kept track of her ovulation schedule. Ron never did that.

She wondered if Draco and Astoria only did it once a month when she was ovulating. No wonder they weren't getting anywhere. Didn't they know they needed to do it much more than that. Hermione knew all the tricks to increasing the chance of getting pregnant, and if you were having difficulty, like most purebloods were by the way, you pretty much had to be constantly drenched in... it. Ideally with the assistance of the female orgasm. Didn't they know anything.

Obviously, they couldn't stand each other, so they could only bare it once a month.

Hermione hit the books, she had one month to get this all sorted.

Chapter 6

Chapter 6

The next couple of weeks passed pretty quickly. She only saw the Malfoys at breakfast. She spent most of her time there, and it really was big enough that you didn't have to see anyone unless you wanted to.

She spent most of her time in the library. She didn't really have anywhere else to go. Her flat had been packed up and rented out to someone else, so she didn't have anywhere else to go.

Renting a place of her own would be a very odd thing to do, and truthfully, she had plenty of time and space to herself at Malfoy Manor. Plus it would bring about a really awkward conversation if she charged a flat to the Malfoy's account. She didn't have any money of her own and she certainly couldn't access her own little account considering she was deceased and looking remarkably like someone else.

Her research was pretty discouraging. First of all, she couldn't find anything related to taking up occupation in someone else's body. Secondly, even if she could prove that she was an imposter in this body, the marriage between it and Draco would still stand. Marriage was between the bloodlines, and the blood was still there. Why did everything have to be about blood with these people?

So no matter how incapacitated or altered the wife became mentally, the marriage was still valid. She couldn't find any leeway that she could use to claim she was another person, ie. not the person he married, because legally he married the body and not the soul. So in short, she just happened to be stuck in Draco Malfoy's property.

She still had a moment of extreme confusion when she woke up in the mornings. She still had the odd times when she thought this was her own personal hell. It was an odd thing. Basically she was offered what she'd wanted, a husband who really wanted a child and a body capable of producing one, at least according to the medical community. A stable home, enough money to ensure she could do the things she wanted to do. On the surface it was a wish come true.

There was just a small drawback, just one little detail, it had to be with Draco Malfoy. You can have everything you wanted, but it must be with the person you've always despised. And let's not forget that the feeling was mutual even more so from his side maybe. Now if that wasn't a dilemma made in hell, she didn't know what was.

Her complete obsession with having a baby and it was no within reach, it just had to be with Draco Malfoy. And said child will then grow up to be a Malfoy.

She knew that life was about compromises, but this was a little much, wasn't it?

Maybe if Draco knew that his schoolhood nemesis was now in his wife's body. Maybe it would be enough to bring about some kind of divorce, even though it is not a done thing in

their society for any reason. Surely being accidentally married to someone would be enough to qualify. Although she knew it wasn't. She'd come across a case where two people had married under the influence of the Imperio curse, as a joke and that marriage still stood.

Malfoy might want a separation if he knew he was truly tethered to a mudblood. Although, technically the body was still of the pureblood bloodline. Not to mention the fact that Draco did not believe her. She had mentioned her predicament a few times and he'd assumed that she was mental. Actually, she suspected that he might be thinking that his wife was making up excuses for not sharing the marital bed with him.

What does that say about their marriage, when one spouse assumed the other would fake a mental illness to avoid doing it with them. Maybe he was really bad at it, she thought with amusement.

Hermione's musing were disturbed by someone in the fireplace.

"Astoria, darling, we're still on for today, aren't we." The head in the fireplace said. After closer inspection, Hermione was shocked to see it was Pansy.

"Today?" Hermione asked uncertainly.

"You haven't forgotten, have you?" Pansy said. "We are going to Sertrini's, remember."

"I'm sorry Pansy, I'd forgotten." Hermione said, not really knowing what else to say.

"Well, get ready." Pansy said. "I am coming over in half an hour. I knew you'd forget, you're such a scatterbrain, Astoria."

Pansy was true to her word. Hermione didn't know what to do, but in the end she decided it was better to just go along with it for now. Hermione knew that Sertrini's was a restaurant that didn't welcome all.

Pansy was dressed immaculately when she dragged Hermione out of the house.

"So, how is everything?" Pansy said as they were finally seated with drinks.

"I had a bit of a knock on the head." Hermione said. "Haven't quite been myself since."

"Sorry to hear that." Pansy said, but the sympathy wasn't quite there.

"How is your husband?" Hermione asked since she remembered that Pansy married an older man.

"Decrepit. But very rich. Nothing has changed." Pansy said with a laugh. "How is yours?"

"Haven't seen him much." Hermione said. It was really strange having a conversation with Pansy. Hermione was quite curious to see what Pansy was like without all the snarling.

"How is Theo?" Pansy said to Hermione's surprise.

"Haven't seen him either." Hermione responded with a bit of a blush from the embarrassment although she wasn't sure why she was embarrassed. Pansy obviously knew about Astoria's affair with Theo. It made her wonder if Pansy also had someone on the side. She decided to go out on a limb, "And yours?"

“Can’t complain.” Pansy said with a sly smile. “Now what are we going to do about Felicity?”

“I’m sure you have some idea what you want to do.” Hermione said. Not sure what Pansy was referring to or who Felicity was, but better to let Pansy talk.

“Well, I have couple of idea.” Pansy started. “The cow needs to pay.”

Hermione wondered what this Felicity girl had done to upset Pansy.

“For starters, Clarissa won’t be inviting her to the do next week.” Pansy said haughtily. “That will give the cow some pause.”

Hermione just nodded. Apparently Pansy was just as nasty even when she wasn’t snarling. She suspected that Pansy and Astoria might be friends considering how frank Pansy was around her.

“Is Daphne still harassing you for invites?” Pansy asked.

“Yes.” Hermione said remembering the conversation with Daphne about some vacation house, wondering where this was going to lead.

“That girl just doesn’t get it.” Pansy started, while forking the salad that had just arrived for her. “Still expect you to rescue her loser husband from social Siberia. Really what does she expect if she married someone like that? I mean, he is from a good family, but seriously, Deltross was never going to achieve anything.”

“I believe it was an arranged marriage.” Hermione said, a bit shocked that Pansy was so mean to someone who seemed to be her friend in school.

“Oh please, if you can’t influence your parents, you really deserve what you get.” Pansy said dismissively. Pansy went on for a while longer about how Daphne had let herself go and now with a brat to cramp her less than stellar style, completing her hopelessness.

Pansy went on to plan her campaign against this Felicity girl and the complexity of the plan was a bit surprising to Hermione.

“You really aren’t feeling yourself, are you?” Pansy concluded. “You haven’t said boo all throughout lunch.”

“No, I’m not myself.” Hermione said. “Maybe it will come right over time.”

Pansy seemed to eye her suspiciously. “Come on, I’ll take you back.” Pansy said and they walked towards the fireplace. They didn’t pay, Hermione noticed but wasn’t going to question. Must be some kind of standing tab. Good to know if she ever found herself starving and stuck without a knut.

Hermione was actually looking forward to being rid of Pansy. Hermione had concluded that Pansy was a formidable enemy considering the lengths she was willing to plan someone’s demise. They were all kind of lucky that Voldemort was dismissive of females, because Pansy’s planning abilities were shockingly good if they were directed into something useful.

And Astoria, the bitch, was refusing to help her sister improve her and her husband’s position. Hermione never had a sister, but she was pretty sure she would never treat her sister

like that.

“Let’s go see if Drakie is here.” Pansy said when they were back at Malfoy Manor. Hermione had been wondering why Pansy had been adamant at taking her back.

Pansy led them toward one of the studies that Hermione had identified was probably Draco’s. Pansy opened the door after a quick knock. To Hermione’s surprise, Draco was actually inside.

“Drakie.” Pansy said with glee. ‘How are you darling?’ She said and left Hermione to go kiss Draco on the cheeks. Very European. “I’m just returning your darling wife to you.”

“Excellent.” Draco said and sat down. Pansy was leaning on the desk.

“We have been to lunch at Sertrini’s.” Pansy cooed. “Although we missed your company.”

“I am sure you managed just fine, Pansy.” Draco said amused.

The interaction made Hermione wonder if Draco and Pansy were having an affair. Probably not. Pansy would be much more discreet, probably. Although Hermione got the distinct feeling that Pansy would very much like it to be so.

Hermione walked over towards the desk. Curious to watch this interaction.

Pansy seemed to notice something on the desk. It was the Daily Prophet from the day after Hermione was killed by a chimney, the one with the picture of her from her 25th birthday.

“That awful girl.” Pansy said with a laugh. “So like her to get killed by a Chimney. Crass in every conceivable way. Must have been fate.”

Draco looked up and found Hermione’s eyes. A little bit of mischief sparkled there. After all, his wife, in her deluded post injury mind though she was Hermione Granger, didn’t she. Come on Draco, sell out your wife to her horrible friend, Hermione thought when she looked into his eyes.

Draco leaned back in his chair and smirked slightly. Go on, Hermione thought, do it. It would make Astoria the subject of ridicule for a very long time.

But he looked away.

“Why do you still have this?” Pansy asked.

“I just haven’t had the elves in here for a while.” Draco said. “I forgot about it.”

Pansy threw the paper away across the other side of the desk. “Anyway, must go. She said.” You will come to the do next week. I will be distraught if you didn’t come. “Pansy was almost batting her eyelids.

“Wouldn’t miss it for the world.” He said, but Hermione almost thought he looked bored.

Pansy looked like she was trying to find some reason to stay, but nothing was extending to her, so she finally turned and walked out. “I will see you then.” She called from the door. Hermione could have sworn she was posing.

“I will see you later, sweetie.” Pansy said to Hermione with a wink.

Which left Hermione with Draco in his study. The awkwardness of the situation was pressing.

“I better go change.” Hermione finally said. Draco just watched her, which made her extremely uncomfortable. She wondered if Draco was going to rub it in that he hadn’t sold her out. Ron would have, in a mischievous but not malicious way. But the silence just continued.

Hermione excused herself and left. Lunch with Pansy made her feel queasy to the point where she actually wanted a bath.

Chapter 7

A/N Some of those reading are wondering where the inspiration for this story came from. Predominantly from a TV series called 'Dead like me', perhaps not much remembered, but I like it, where a girl gets hit by a flying toilet seat and gets a choice to live again if she would work as a grim reaper. Hence the premise, a second life, but only if its with Draco Malfoy. Hermione would probably choose death, so had to make the choice less obvious. Also influenced by 'Drop Dead Jane' which I have read about but not actually seen yet. Plus loads of other sources, none of which I can specifically recall.

Chapter 7

Hermione still didn't have any luck with her research. She had read everything there was in the Malfoy library about death and ghosts, which the wizarding world knew little about. The only accounts of deaths were from ghosts and their stories were all pretty much the same. Refusing to go, sheer obstinacy. Apparently there is a pull somewhere and they refuse to budge. Eventually the pull stopped.

Hermione didn't remember any kind of pull, she was unconscious. Maybe she didn't die, but her body was. This was making her head hurt.

She just wanted to go home, she hated it here, hated these people. All along they had been trying to exclude her and she had, although she'd never admit it, been jealous of being on the outside, but really, there was nothing on the inside to want. They were awful to each other, each worse than the other.

It would kill her to be stuck here forever. If she was stuck here and bound to Draco, she really might be better off dead. Not that her old life was much to brag about, she was incredibly lonely, all her friends were pairing off, getting absorbed in their own lives and none of them had a lot of time for her. Even Harry, who was now working, with a family, and all his spare time was spent building extensions to his house. Last she heard, Ginny wanted an indoor pool. Merlin knows why.

And now she was dead and they had all moved on from that experience, except her apparently, stuck here in this awful, cold existence. She guessed if you grew up in this, you would never miss what you didn't have. She wondered if Draco had ever had any true friends.

She still only saw him at breakfast, but Pansy's 'do' was coming up quick to Hermione's chagrin. Another night of being paraded around.

As per usual, she let Red dress her and make her ready. Hermione was first downstairs this time, but still got the disapproving looks. Draco side along apparated her as per norm. So predictable.

"Stay close." He said.

Hermione bristled at being spoken to like a dog, but she didn't want to seek out any dark corner either and suffer a similar experience to the last party. Some girl she vaguely

remembered from Slytherin came and spoke to her. It was a pleasant enough conversation.

Draco came back and took her to greet Pansy, along with the customary air kisses. They chatted for a while, Pansy flirted while her older husband was swigging back the drinks. I would probably drink too if I was married to her, Hermione thought.

The night went on, Draco dragged her around, chatted to people, was the charming personality he seemed to conjure for parties. He got into a political discussion with an older man and Hermione offered to replenish the drinks.

She made it to the bar, which served up whatever kind of drink the partygoers wanted. Blaise Zabini came up to the bar next to her. He ordered two firewhiskeys.

"Astoria, my dear, you look lovely tonight." He said in his lazy drawl. Hermione wondered if there was some history between Blaise and Astoria. "But you always look lovely. How have you been keeping? Staying fit I see."

"Fine." Hermione said. "You know, same old usual. And you?"

"Can't complain." Blaise said. He was giving her the Blaise eyes. His heavy lids over than intense stare. He was notorious in school for the try to be seductive look, that sadly worked again and again. He was hitting on her, yuck. "I get by."

"Seeing anyone?" Hermione asked, trying to get his attention on whoever he was supposedly committed too. He wasn't married, she knew. He had been the number one bachelor in this community for five years straight now.

He shrugged. Hermione jumped as she felt a hand on her back, but realised it was Draco. The one allowed to have his hand on her back. God, she hated these people.

"Astoria, darling." Draco said, his voice a bit colder than his normal cold. "I see you found our Blaise."

"Yes." She said. "He's getting some drinks."

"I bet he is." Draco said, smiling at Blaise. Draco was standing very close. "Everything alright, Blaise?"

"Never better." Blaise said.

There was something going on here, Hermione realised. She could feel Draco's body along her side. He turned to her. "Now I am going to speak to the Minister and then I would like to introduce you to Madam Denillion. Seek me out in five minutes. I will be right over there." He said as he lifted the glass he had taken out of her hand and pointed.

Hermione thought he would leave, but he didn't. Instead he brought her closer and leaned down. He was going to kiss her and Hermione was too shocked to move. It started with the barest of touches. She could feel his breath on her lips before he kissed her properly. It wasn't forced, it wasn't hard, but it wasn't light. It was thorough. The only word she could use to describe it. And it flooded her with sensation.

He stroked the inside of her upper lip with his tongue before deepening the kiss. Hermione could feel the kiss down to her toe. It ended as slowly as it began, slowly pulling away

making her want to follow. She hadn't been prepared for that, it had taken her completely by surprise and she couldn't stop the heavy sigh as he pulled away.

Ok, that had been a fantastic kiss. She was still tingling all over and she had to stop herself from putting her fingers on her tingling lips. Wow. No, it was just that it had been such a long time, Hermione told herself, such a very long time since she'd been kissed.

Draco was giving Blaise a look after he pulled away. Hermione realised that she had just been a participant in some kind of pissing game between the two Slytherins, the don't touch my property variety.

Ok, a very, very, very long time since she'd been kissed like that. Draco was gone. Hermione didn't know what to do about herself. She was pretty sure she was beat red, from embarrassment obviously. Blaise was looking at her.

"I have to go to the bathroom." She said and beat a retreat. She found a bathroom and splashed her face with some water.

She'd had no idea Draco Malfoy could kiss like that. It indicated some kind of passion, which just didn't go with the cold, sneering persona. Well, he was very good at putting on a performance, she thought, and she didn't appreciate being used as part of his little turf war with his 'friends'. Had they nothing better to do than to sleep around with each others' wives.

Anyway, Hermione did what she was told and joined Draco. The last thing she wanted was little scene. In the meantime she was going to have to think of a way to stop being required at these awful get together. Maybe she would give herself the horrid and persistent acne she gave that snivelly cow who ratted them out in fifth year. Maybe a nice set of matching boils. Draco would rather cut off his arm than be seen with her in public. She could blame it on a number of Astoria's 'best friends'.

Draco's hand was again at the small of her back and it burned. Hermione wanted to shift with the uncomfortable feeling, but edging away only made him pull her closer. Which at this point was only reminding her of what he expected of her in a week or so. An absolute impossibility.

How impossible was it, she wondered. A baby, a wonderful, life filling baby. It was enough to bring on some moisture in the back of her eyes. He was talking away to some lady in French. She didn't know he spoke French and really well to. She could stutter it out, but he was completely fluent.

He wasn't ugly physically, he never had been. His body, which she incidentally was squeezed up against, was toned. He could kiss like a movie star, but it was Draco Malfoy, what else can you say? Although part of her felt a little stab of glee that he would have to taint himself with her dirty existence. Even if he only found out after he died, he would still exist forever with the knowledge that he sullied himself with someone so impure, broke all his own conventions. Unwittingly, but it was revenge in a metaphysical way.

Blessedly the party was finally over and Draco walked her into the hall where the guests were saying their goodbyes to the host. Pansy gave her a light hug and then Draco, and Hermione was sure that Pansy's hand strayed a tiny bit. Whatever, she thought.

Draco apparated her back.

“Could you try not to hit on every man in the room.” He said coldly. “It wouldn’t be so bad if you had an ounce of discretion, but you’re like a hippo on a bus. I know that brain of yours doesn’t function for most purposes, but I will not allow you at parties if you’re going to behave like that.”

“Like what?” Hermione shot back. She hadn’t done anything that was out of line. She had been a sport all night and toed the line.

“You were practically all over Blaise.” He said.

“Was not.” She said. “Are you seriously that jealous that you get upset if she talks to anyone.”

“That wasn’t anyone.” He said. “That was Blaise. And quit talking about yourself in the third person.”

“I will talk about myself any way I like thank you.” She said. “And don’t worry, Blaise’s charms aren’t as irresistible as you think.”

“Really, Astoria. Already been there and done that?” He snapped.

Hermione didn’t know what to say, she had no idea if it was true or not. She had no idea if Draco was just being irrationally jealous or just fed up with a straying wife who did a poor job hiding it.

“I don’t know what your wife did or didn’t do.” She said. “I am not your wife and I would prefer that you didn’t treat me like it.”

“Oh yes, the I’m Hermione Granger spiel.” Draco said with a little hand flourish. “It is getting really old. You really didn’t know her well, did you?”

“Neither did you.” Hermione said.

“I knew her a lot better than you did.” Draco said. “Really Astoria, you couldn’t have picked a person who was more different from you. You should have picked a person you would have a chance of acting like.”

“I’m not acting like Hermione Granger?” Hermione said with astonishment.

“Not even remotely.”

“Oh, how so?” Hermione asked, not sure if she was more annoyed or curious. “I would like to hear how I am not acting like Hermione Granger.”

“First of all, she would dress leaving something to the imagination.” He said and Hermione looked down. Ok, maybe this wasn’t her kind of outfit, but there wasn’t such variety to choose from in Astoria’s wardrobe.

“Second,” he continued. “Granger wouldn’t go to gossip lunches with Pansy Parkinson. And thirdly, Hermione Granger would *never* let me kiss her.”

It was just that it had been a really long time, she wanted to yell, but she wasn’t sure that would sound convincing even to herself if said out loud.

“Where as you,” He said nastily, “are anybody’s. You have no self respect at all.” With that he turned and strode away.

Hermione couldn’t think of anything smart to yell after him. She had to make do with an unsatisfying foot stomp and then the knowledge of acting so childish afterwards. Everything he said was true, but she had done all those things, except the being anybody’s part, although apparently she had just succumbed tonight to her hated nemesis without so much as a pause. Just a little kiss and she had lost all ability to reason. Ouch that stung.

Chapter 8

Chapter 8

Research was getting her nowhere. She had to have a break, her brain was petrifying. She decided that maybe a walk around would clear out the churning mess going on in her brain. She needed stimuli so she decided to go to Diagon Alley and just walk around for a bit. Maybe have a cup tea somewhere.

Madam Malkin had come out with her new spring line. Stuff Astoria would like. Hermione just wanted a pair of jeans. Maybe she would go into muggle London and buy some, but she didn't have any muggle money. She could imagine the disapproving looks she would get from all the Malfoys if she came down to breakfast in jeans and hoodie.

She walked around aimlessly for a while before deciding a cup of tea and some biscuits might be nice. The lunchtime crowd had left and the cafes were slower now. She actually needed to do something about the clothes situation. She had gained weight from where she was when she first took up residence in Astoria's body, wherever Astoria was she was probably livid.

It didn't look bad though, Hermione thought, a bit more curves than the stick figure she'd inherited. Hermione wasn't a big eater, but Astoria must have eaten next to nothing.

Hermione sat down in the cafe with a cup of tea and a slice of chocolate cake. She had a good look out the window, at the shoppers going by. It was nice being on her own surrounded by the buzz of the district. The chocolate cake was divine, cure for pretty much all ailments. The medical community was seriously underestimating its power.

She was close to finishing when she looked up and saw Ron walking down the street. What was he doing here? He should have been at work at this time. He walked along until he recognised someone and his face lit up in a great smile. It was the woman she had seen in her flat just after the weirdness started. Ron grabbed the woman and gave her a kiss, not just a peck but an 'I've been waiting all day for this' kind of kiss.

A look she hadn't seen on him since the end of the war probably. They were still lingering near each other, talking very intimately until Ron kissed her forehead and took her hand. Then they moved down the street away from Hermione's view.

Hermione just knew they were doing wedding stuff. Ron had taken some time off work and they were doing wedding stuff. Hermione felt a stab in her chest. She didn't feel right begrudging Ron his happiness, because he was obviously happy, but she was. It was so unfair. He got to leave her behind and go onto find a fabulous and fulfilling relationship and she got to be dead.

She wasn't going to be invited to Ron's wedding she realised. They would all be there and she wasn't going to be. They all thought she was dead. And now they had all moved on. Ready to celebrate Ron's wedding.

Hermione lost her appetite completely and her spirits had just crumbled. Her life was over. She had been so distracted with the weirdness of what was going on, it really just struck her that she was dead. And no matter what she did, who she managed to convince, things would not go back to the way they were, her body was gone and she was stuck in a new one that happened to be Draco Malfoy's wife.

Hermione apparated home and went to bed. She cried. Cried for the life she had lost. Granted it had not gone according to plan in many respects but it was hers, the one her parents had given her. She would have said fate, but considering where she was, she wasn't going to even touch that one.

That evening, she pleaded illness from whatever do that Malfoys were required at. She was not up for the pretence. Her face was red and puffy, her eyes were bloodshot. It wouldn't be difficult to convince someone she was ill, although no one came to check.

She couldn't sleep that night. She lay in bed thinking, crying and being angry. She sat at the window and watched the sunrise, she felt incredibly alone. Like there was no one else in the world. Everyone was asleep snuggled up to their loved one, content in their warm cocoons. Hermione's room was freezing, but she felt that was how it should be. Her skin was cold and her hands and feet were numb from the cold. She felt like a bit of punishment for being such an oddity, such a complete loser.

After she watched the sun for a while, she decided that even losers needed a bit of love so she headed for the shower. The warm water burned her fingers and toes. It took ages for her body to warm up again, but finally she was warm and pink again. Just in time for breakfast with the Malfoys. She started crying again.

Hermione woke up again at around two in the afternoon. There was another damned event that evening, Hermione didn't know where, it didn't matter. She was going to have to decide what to do. This couldn't go on forever. She just didn't know what to do.

She could just run away, but she wasn't sure what that would achieve. She would still be married to Malfoy and most likely still under the charm that would stop her from falling pregnant to anyone other than him. It was a fairly common marriage stipulation and Draco would have been an idiot not to put it on Astoria considering her behaviour.

She could try to challenge her situation legally, try to get her friends to support her through some kind of annulment of the marriage. The chances of it being successful were slim, even if she convinced everyone, there wasn't grounds for a divorce. And then what?

Or she could just go for what she wanted, which was a baby. It would mean making it with Draco, which was disturbing, but seriously, a while back she would have made it with a troll if it meant she'd get pregnant. She could feel her body changing, tensing for ovulation, that shortness of breath that seemed to accompany it on some level. Hermione knew everything there was to know about ovulation.

Just use him for his sperm, he would get an heir and she would get the one thing she wanted above all else. Later they could live separately, it was not unheard of. He didn't seem to have any great affection for Astoria, so there was no great loss for either of them.

She felt a bit awkward about using somebody, but he had married Astoria in the first place, if he'd expected a loving marriage, it wasn't what he got so he'd be no worse off.

Harry probably wouldn't understand, Ron definitely wouldn't understand. If she went the Draco route, she would probably get what she wanted, if she didn't she probably wouldn't. She knew if she decided to go for the baby it might be better for all concerned that she just kept quiet about the situation and went with it. Draco probably wouldn't go through with it if he knew he was in bed with her. But that also meant letting go of Harry and Ron, who didn't really have that much time for her as it was. Trading the past for the future.

No, she decided, she would be Machiavellian about this, she was going to get what she wanted. For once she was going to put herself first. For some undeterminable reason, she wasn't dead, her life should have ended some weeks back. She was not going to let things slip away from her again.

So she would be Astoria, she said as she looked at Astoria's beautiful and cold face in the mirror. A face that suited single minded pursuit of one's goal. She would stop trying to convince anyone she was someone else. Astoria would understand, it is what she would do. Astoria apparently did whatever she wanted. Hermione would take direction out of Astoria's book.

She would be the spoilt pureblood wife that everyone treated like a broodmare, then, when she had what she wanted, she could stop the pretence if she wanted to. She didn't care if Malfoy ever knew the truth. It didn't matter, he was as complicit in all this as everyone else.

How hard could it be to play Astoria? She shopped a lot, dressed slutty and slept around. Hermione wasn't interested in sleeping with awful Slytherins other than the necessary one, but she could shop and be bitchy to her 'friends'. How hard could it be?

The elf finally turned up to dress her. Another event. Astoria probably loved events. Hermione decided that she didn't have to be too convincing, being in Astoria's body was pretty much an ace.

Hermione noted the ever present disapproving looks when she got down stairs. She knew the routine now, apparate with Draco, stick to him like glue while he did his thing, smile, say charming and witty things, perhaps. Easy.

The party was at the Zabini's.

"Try to act like an adult." Draco said under his breath.

"I will try my very best, darling." She said with a sweet smile. It made him look at her for the first time that evening.

Hermione did try her best. Some of the conversation was interesting, some of it wasn't. Sometimes she couldn't help to keep her mind from wandering. Everyone was dressed to the nines. She was as well, Red knew exactly what the situation called for which was a blessing because Hermione had no idea.

She would have to sleep with Draco really soon, probably tonight. It was her time and since he kept track of her schedule, he would probably know that. It was the most bizarre thing. She had in her teenage brain wondered what it would be like to be someone special to someone like him. Actually it had been to him specifically, but that was neither here nor there. He had been the number one bachelor in this society pretty much since he hit puberty. The Greengrasses scoring him for one of their daughters was quite a coup.

He wasn't ugly, Hermione confirmed as she looked at him while he chatted to whomever. He was lean, but not skinny. Dressed in black as always. The only time she had ever seen him in colour what in his quidditch uniform.

The jacket was fitted and tailored to perfection. His pants were too, covering the long, lean legs. She studied his form, up towards the waist where the bump in his lean profile was. The bump, the necessary equipment in this plan. The one thing she needed from him. Oh god, this was insane, she thought.

It was murder standing there next to him, with his hand on her lower back, pretending to be happy together. No one knowing, including him that tonight was going to be a unique and effectively prohibited event. But she could not get what she wanted without him. Have him deep inside her to create that spark of life that she would probably kill for.

Her stomach was in knots. She wasn't sure if she could go through with it, she had every intention, but was that enough? Her hands felt clammy and she would clench them to get rid of the tension in her body.

The night was coming to an end and Hermione's breath was catching in her throat. After lengthy goodbyes, he apparated her home.

"It's time." He said. Again barely looking at her.

"I know." She said trying to keep her voice steady.

He followed her up the stairs to her bedroom. Hermione felt nauseous with nervousness, but there was no way she was going to back out. He closed the door behind them and like last time walked over to the dresser and started with his cufflinks.

She just stood there, not knowing what to do with herself. He was undoing the buttons on his shirt and tugging it out of his pants. Hermione couldn't help but stare as the shirt revealed his pale skin.

She was startled when he asked her if she was ready, which obviously she wasn't as she was still fully dressed just standing there staring at him. She realised she had to act, so she started by kicking off her shoes. Then unzipped her dress and let it drop. She was now in her underwear in front of her school nemesis getting ready to get it on. Again, probably the most bizarre thing she had ever experienced.

She got into the bed and stripped of the rest of the clothing while under the sheets. He had seen everything there was to see about Astoria's body, but Hermione was not ready for a blatant display. That was just a step too far.

She was breathing fast when he got into the bed. She felt the weight shift and he moved her knee out of the way to get access to her body.

There was no foreplay, he entered her, he must have had some lubricant somewhere because he just snugly slid it. He slowly moved in and out, and Hermione watched his face above her. He wasn't really looking at her. There was absolutely no passion there. He moved in and out of her. She realised that he felt completely half hearted about this.

Hermione decided to help things along and clenched as hard as she could. He seemed to like it because he picked up speed until the point where he finally grabbed her hips and

forcefully held her hips tightly to him. A little groan that sounded almost painful preceded his release accompanied with heavy sets of ragged breaths. He pulled out after about ten seconds and turned to get up.

That was the unsexiest sex she had ever had. Maybe not as bad as the drunken sex she'd had with Ron in the beginning when she was too stupid to say no. But it was right up there. If she had known he'd be even capable of being this bad at it when she'd been was a teenager, it would have done her self esteem a world of good.

She heard the door close as he left. She didn't want to get up, waste any of the fluids that they had both practically suffered for. She put a pillow under her hips to keep as much of it in as long as possible. She didn't have great hopes though, in her determination, quality of sex did matter when you were trying to get pregnant and they were never going to get pregnant if all they did was this once a month.

Chapter 9

Chapter 9

Hermione lay in bed and thought about the events last night. It had been a horror show, but it was a step in the right direction. But there would have to be much more if she was going to get what she wants. He was going to have to put out.

He disappeared so fast after breakfast, she didn't have a chance to see him. She asked Red to let him know when he was back, which the elf did not long after lunch.

Hermione marched down to Draco's study and knocked.

"What do you want, Astoria?" He asked.

"We need to talk." She said.

"Really, about what?"

"You know, about getting pregnant." She said.

"That is your duty." He said.

"Well I can't do it alone, unfortunately." She said. He was silent now, put his paper down and looked at her. "What are you on about?"

"Look, if we are going to have a baby," she started, still not truly believing she was having this conversation with him, "we are going to have to make more of an effort."

"I think I've made all the effort I can tolerate." He said sharply. "And you want a baby like you want a hole in your head."

"Well, I have changed my mind. I want a baby. Now."

He was staring at her. "Still not right in the head, then?"

"I am fine." She said, "I just need to get on with things."

"You don't sound right." He said. "And frankly, Astoria, there is only so much of you I can handle. I am just not into second hand goods, or whatever umpteenth version of hand goods you are now."

"I realise... we have had some problems in the past." Hermione said feeling very uncomfortable.

"Problems, you were the biggest mistake I ever made." He said. "I don't know what you're playing at Astoria, but I don't want to touch you more than I absolutely have to. I know my duty, its a shame you are so disillusioned about yours."

Hermione didn't want to talk about his and Astoria's marriage. "We have to do it more often if we are going to get pregnant." She said. "And better."

“Better?”

“Babies go where they are wanted.” Hermione said, quoting the flighty new age muggle healer who was absolutely useless, but if circumstances had been different could well have been Trelawney’s best friend. Such had been her desperation and now she was mortified that she quoted this woman.

“Yes well, I think I would rather drop dead. Although I’ve kind of hoping you would be obliging.” He said bitterly.

You kind of got your wish, Hermione thought.

“Although that would be a mute point.” He said. “Because you’re all the same.”

Oh great, a misogynist. Why wasn’t she surprised.

“If we make an effort now.” She said. “Then when its done, you never have to touch me again.”

“You’d like that wouldn’t you.” He said viciously. “You’re not under the illusion that you are going to be given free rein to do whatever you can think of in that pea brain. No Astoria, you married into this family, you now have to live up to its standards. If you think producing a child will give you the freedom to shack up with your lovers, you are sadly mistaken.”

She didn’t know what to say. He’d obviously had a bad time of it with his marriage. He was so incredibly bitter.

“Look,” she said, “I can’t quite remember everything that has gone on in the pasts, but I am sorry.”

“Oh, that is just supremely convenient, isn’t it Astoria.” He said. “Could you just leave now. I have things to do.”

He turned back towards his desk and started up with whatever he was doing. Hermione had a feeling that things were not going to get better if she stayed, so she left him to it.

She couldn’t believe she was dealing with an unwilling man. Men were always willing, they may have been unhappy with the circumstances, like Ron, but he was always willing when it was presented to him. Then again, she had never treated him like Astoria had treated Draco. Somehow she couldn’t quite see Draco as an innocent party, if Astoria was destructive, she would bet that Draco had brought it on in some way. She still didn’t want to think about their marriage, it was completely irrelevant.

Well, there really only was one thing for an unwilling man, she would just have to deal with his hostile barriers. She was going to have to seduce him. Again not something she had any experience with, but he was standing in her way. Actually her seduction abilities were probably pretty low. Last night had been the first time she’d had sex in quite a long time. After she found out she was barren, it had kind of lost its purpose. And the act only reinforced how useless she was, so it just kind of just slipped off the radar.

There was no party or event on tonight. So dinner would be at home. Hermione hated family dinners with the Malfoys and would take hers in her room. But tonight she would come downstairs. Tonight she was going to try it on with Draco. If her teenage self could hear her now.

Dinner was a usual affair, quiet, constrained, boring. After it was over, Hermione followed Draco back to his study.

“What do you want, Astoria?” He said again, it seemed to be his usual greeting for her.

“I think we need to finish the discussion from this afternoon.” She said. He was standing in front of his desk facing away from her.

“I don’t think there is more to discuss.” He said.

“Maybe not so much to discuss as such.” She said and moved to stand behind him. She let her fingers touch the material of his shirt.

“You have got to be joking.” He said with astonishment. “I would rather have sex with a troll.” He said, and it was funny to Hermione because she had said something similar once, but for different reasons.

But he didn’t move away, so Hermione made her touch a little stronger.

“Do you have no shame at all?” He asked.

If I did, I wouldn’t be trying it on with Draco Malfoy, she thought. “Apparently not.” She said.

She snuck her hands around him to stroking his sides.

“Its not going to work Astoria, my body does not respond to you.” He said.

Hermione wasn’t sure about that. Well, she wasn’t going to accept no for an answer anyway. He had what she needed and she was going to get it. She pulled down the collar of his shirt to expose the skin on the back of his neck. She kissed him on the exposed skin and he tried to pull away. She was close enough to breath in his scent. It was something she had identified before, from way before, but she never knew what it was.

She let her hands roam all over his chest and pulled her shirt out so she could access his skin. He was warm and his skin was incredibly smooth.

“Is this what you do, Astoria, to get what you want?” He said. He wasn’t pulling away, he was letting her touch him, so she continued. He liked it, she realised, liked to be touched. Maybe needed it. She pulled his shirt off to expose his upper body.

Hermione had to concede that this was thrilling. It was so incredibly naughty. She moved closer so she was touching him with more than her hands. She moved her hands down to play with the waist of his pants.

“You’re a whore, Astoria.” He said but he was a touch breathy. This was working, she realised. She was actually seducing him. “Shameless whore.” He said quietly.

Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never get in my way, she thought. She moved her fingers towards his belt. His stomach was so tight and the skin felt like butter over the muscles. Hermione couldn’t believe she was doing this, but didn’t want to think too hard on it, because she would chicken out.

“Is this what you want?” He asked.

“Yes.” She said.

“Fine.” He said and he moved at lightning speed and she was face down on the desk. He was behind her and pulled her dress up over her backside.

“As the whore demands then.” He said and he was inside her. It was rougher than she would have liked, but he body was not entirely unprepared. It was very close to painful as he forcefully drove into her. Although on some level not, it was all very borderline. His hand was in her hair and it was treating her scalp quite roughly. It also didn’t take long. He came with a loud growl, before slumping down. He put all his weight on the hand he had on her back, holding her down on the desk.

After a few seconds of heavy breathing, he pulled out and zipped up.

“Thanks, darling.” He said acrimoniously, “That was... satisfying. Now get out of my sight.”

Hermione knew that was meant as a punishment. He was angry with her and he had just punished her. Hermione pulled the dress down her exposed backside. She wasn’t quite sure how she felt. If the circumstances had been different that would have been unacceptable behaviour. But she had set that up and invited it, then he took it to punish her.

She wasn’t quite angry. Surprised maybe. She got what she wanted. She had practically begged him to have sex with her, and he did, but he made it clear he wasn’t happy about her forcing the issue. She certainly hadn’t expected wine and chocolate with him. Whatever just happened was a reflection on his and Astoria’s relationship.

She still wasn’t sure how she felt about it. He had perhaps meant to make sure she’d never approach him again, she thought. If anyone should speak of shirking his duty, it was him. He was going the absolute bare minimum. He might just have bit back, but she didn’t care. He might have meant to injure her pride or whatever, but he really didn’t know her. It was a long time since she let Draco Malfoy injure her, and a bit of rough sex wasn’t going to do it. Like she said, she’d sleep with a troll if it would get her pregnant. She would be back tomorrow.

Chapter 10

Chapter 10

She had now had sex with Draco Malfoy twice and she was going to do it again tonight. She didn't care if he was fall down drunk, it would happen. Although she had never seen him drunk. He drank, but he was always sober. Whatever he did for fun and relaxation, she didn't see it. In fact, the only fun he had ever seen him have ever was being a bully. In truth, she'd only said attention to him when he was mean, but she couldn't recall any time in school when he'd been anything but. He had incredible charm when he wanted to, but it wasn't real. But when he put it on, it really was something.

He certainly wasn't stupid and he was smart enough to know how to charm people. He was very observant, he knew how to read people, which was something she would have to keep in mind as she was trying to pass for Astoria. She had to do what she did, well not all of it, but she needed to start spending money. And probably not in the way she wanted which was to buy up anything interesting in Flourish and Blotts. Maybe she could start buying baby things. There was danger emotionally down that road, she knew, but it was so tempting and so hopeful to look at baby gear.

She wondered what their baby would look like. It might be a certainty that it would be blond. Obviously it wouldn't look like her because she was gone. The thought made her sad, but a baby, any baby would be an absolute joy. At least Astoria's genes would live on. It didn't sound like that was important to Astoria, but who knows. Hermione would love the baby more than anything in the world. And she could guide it well through the less than ideal family it landed in.

Dying had certainly made her consider what was important in life and for her there was only one thing that had any relevance anymore. Hating Draco and his family wasn't important. Not that she'd ever like what they believed or stood for. They were just trying to get by like everyone else, in a twisted way, but not ultimately important provided they weren't hurting people.

The familiar hope that she might be pregnant this very minute filled her with joy and fear. Fear for the later realisation that she wasn't and the crushing sorrow that brought. But she had a real chance now, not some hopeless wish for a miracle.

There was too much free time in Astoria's lifestyle, it was killing Hermione trying to occupy that much idle time. She would go shopping for a gown, she decided. There was a black tie event on. There were several gowns in Astoria's closet, but she needed to keep up the image of Astoria, so she would shop.

She couldn't help liking the red gown she saw at Madam Malkins. It wasn't a colour she was supposed to pick, but it was gorgeous and Astoria's body looked practically sinful in it. If there ever was a dress that Malfoy would have to notice, this might be it. Even if only to hate the Gryffindor colour. It wasn't something Hermione would ever pick, but it was something Astoria would probably pick.

A pair of gold strappy heels would have gone perfectly, but that would probably have been pushing it. Again, she didn't have to pay anything, it was all on the Malfoy account. She wondered what kind of dent Astoria had made on the Malfoy account with her shopping trips.

She was going to seduce him again tonight. It was her one and only purpose. Jeez she looked tall in this dress. Hermione had never really been girly. It wasn't her style and she had never really been in an environment that allowed it. She couldn't well spend an evening at the Burrow in this dress, could she. It was interesting to explore the more girly things in life, even though it wasn't really her thing.

There was also something very exciting about ruthlessly going for what she wanted. She usually did in life, but not quite so single-mindedly. Actually that was not true, she had dragged Ron across half the globe in search for a remedy for their problem. That was before the hopelessness set in. And it was so nice to not feel hopeless anymore.

She took some time to get ready that evening. Draco was dressed in more formal robes when she got down to the entranceway. It didn't do him a disservice. He wearily appraised her, but didn't comment.

The usual circus started when they arrived, she would stick to Draco and look pretty. Look adoring. This really wasn't her scene, but this is was being Astoria involved so she would do it for now. Draco would be his charming self and would pretend that he loved his wife.

Hermione stood a little bit closer to him tonight. Touching was important if she was going to keep his attention when they went home. She needed to keep his mind on the more carnal things. Maybe she wasn't half bad at this seduction thing. Maybe she should get Blaise to come over and chat so Draco would kiss her again. That had been one hell of a kiss. That kiss told her there was passion in him somewhere because he could draw out a semblance of it if he wanted to.

But she was getting distracted, she realised. She wasn't after his passion, she just needed sex. She would have to be careful lest she seduce herself. That would just complicate everything.

She did her best to be charming too. Even engage in the conversation when she wasn't ever so subtly keeping Malfoy's mind distracted.

When the evening ended, he apparated her back. He didn't say anything to her as Lucius and Narcissa took their leave. The entrance way was dark and she couldn't quite see his eyes. But she knew he was watching her.

"What are you up to Astoria?" He asked quietly.

"Me?"

"Mmm." He said.

"Well." She said and played with one of the buttons on his shirt. "Until I get my baby, I am going to make things hard for you."

"Is that so?" He asked distractedly, but she knew she had his attention. She snuck her finger in between the buttons of his shirt and pulled him towards her. He didn't fight. He was close now, she was filled with his scent again. Ok, Draco Malfoy could be incredibly sexy,

she conceded, in a stoic and unapproachable sense. Particularly if you try really hard to seduce him.

She brought her lips up to his and stroked his lightly. He wasn't participating, but she wasn't giving up. He hadn't walked away, so there was interest there on some level. She tried again and kissed him. A third attempt and something broke, he was now kissing her back. Tentatively at first, then fiercely.

She had never kissed him for real before, kissed him in private. And she was losing her senses to anything else. She wanted him really badly and anything else seemed to have slipped her mind.

She pulled his as close as she could and he seemed to do the same. The clothes were in the way of the heat and the driving desire. She wanted him closer. She felt a wall behind her and he was finally close, pressed up against her with force. They were still kissing and his hand was moving up her thigh underneath her dress. She still wanted him much closer and her legs seemed to move around his hips to draw him in.

He was kissing her neck now and she was just burning in every way possible. She wasn't sure how it happened but he was coming inside her now and it was beautiful. She felt filled but needed still more. She wasn't sure how he managed to lift her in the standing position but he kept on stroking her with sensation. Mesmerising her to a complete focus on the sensation and the delicious tension building in her body.

She was coming, she felt the tightening and it was relentless. No, no, she said, too soon. It was too soon. She needed to come with him or after him, but she couldn't stop it. It exploded over her as she tightly held onto him. Shit, she thought, she came too soon. Hers was just tailing off when he came into his shattering release.

His heavy breathing shook them both as she was still wrapped around him in every possible sense. Her dress fell down as he stepped back from her and Hermione was grateful for the wall holding her up. He quickly sorted himself and stepped back again. He didn't say anything and he turned away and walked off.

Hermione wanted to kick herself. She'd come too early. After all that effort, she had lost it and come too early. What was wrong with her, she chided herself. There was now a mess to deal with, and it was going to ruin the beautiful gown unless she took care of it quick smart. Mess withstanding, she thanks the powers that made making babies such a beautiful thing. If she had to seduce him like that every night, she could do it. She just had to make sure she didn't get lost in it and lost the plot like she did tonight.

Hermione's whole body felt satisfied and languid that night. She decided to have a bath to clean up after. Things had gone almost perfectly that night. The sex had been much better than she had anticipated, probably too good in the scheme of things. Now it was just a matter of doing it again and then setting up a routine. If they kept that up, she would be pregnant in no time.

Chapter 11

Chapter 11

Hermione slept well that night and her body felt languid the next morning. She had seduced Draco the night before, it was incredibly naughty, but her body still felt the repercussions of it as she stretched in bed.

Now she just had to do it again. There was another event on that night. On one level she could kill for a night in front of the TV. There were no TVs here and they entertained themselves in the evening in a more sociable fashion. There was nothing else to do.

She would go, give Draco a hard time with little touches as she played his charming wife. Then when they got home, they would do the same thing.

Draco looked angry at breakfast. He wasn't saying anything, he wasn't looking at her either. He just looked like he was under a bit of a rain cloud. She was pretty sure that he hadn't planned on the little reunion between him and his wife last night. It wouldn't be so bad if there was a bit of reconciliation. He was going to be the father of her child. She would treat him well. She didn't believe they would ever be good friends, but they could be civil and they could have a well functioning partnership.

She didn't want to hurt him. She wasn't planning on it. She would gain nothing from it and she wasn't interest in retribution. When they had a baby together, they would be family. Odd that that sentiment was.

After breakfast she went to Diagon Alley again to check out what the wizard world had in terms of baby gear. She knew, she'd been here before, but it had been a while now. It still didn't sit right, the fear of being disappointed was too strong to let her enjoy it, maybe she would enjoy it when she was confirmed pregnant.

In the end she spent some time in Flourish and Blotts. There were some new interesting books that she wanted, but she didn't have any money and she didn't want to put books on the Malfoy tab. It would be suspicious. She needed some cash but couldn't think of a way to get it. Ideally she wanted some muggle money but that would be even harder to explain.

Before going home she went into a store and bought some shoes. She checked they were the right size but she didn't try them on. Clothing stores really didn't hold that much appeal unless you really needed something.

She was getting used to the routine of getting dressed to go out. There was quite a large dinner on tonight at some pureblood's house. An engagement celebration apparently of some younger Hogwarts Slytherin girl to a Durmstrang boy.

She made her way down to the entrance hall where Draco and Lucius were waiting. Narcissa was late, which was unusual. She stood by Draco and waited. It felt awkward. They had sex a few metres away last night. Maybe they would again tonight. Hermione's body tightened a bit at the thought.

She could feel that Draco was looking at her, but she knew he'd look away if she turned to face him. She wondered what was going on in his mind.

"There you are, my dear." Lucius said. Hermione wasn't sure if there was any real affection between Narcissa and Lucius. He didn't really show it, but then he wasn't the man to show affection. Draco probably wasn't either. That might be a good thing.

Lucius apparated with Narcissa and Hermione took Draco's arm. He hesitated for a moment like he wanted to say something, but didn't.

It was a large event tonight. There were all sorts there, even some Ravenclaws. Hermione settled into the routine as Draco placed his hand on her back. His hand burned and Hermione was immediately reminded of the evenings planned activities. The ones when were alone. She kind of wished she could skip the next few hours and just go home.

Dinner was soon served and they were directed into a large dining hall. She and Draco weren't seated together. Pansy was seated next to Draco down the table somewhere, while she was stuck with a couple of people she didn't know. Hermione noticed that Daphne and her husband were there, which surprised her. She hadn't seen them at any event before. She noticed Daphne because Daphne was intermittently shooting evil looks at her. Oh the joys of sisterly affection, Hermione thought sarcastically.

Pansy was chatting with Draco exclusively, laughing really loudly every once in a while. Apparently Draco was really funny or Hermione suspected that Pansy was flirting with him. She wasn't sure how she felt about that.

Dinner dragged on forever. The man next to her was obviously wanting to show off how important he was. Apparently he was under the impression that she would be impressed by how many of his secretaries would sleep with him.

When it was finally over, Hermione had to go to the bathroom. When she came back, she didn't catch sight of Draco, but she saw Pansy and Daphne talking. They were both holding drinks chatting quite avidly. Pansy caught sight of her and the look she got from Pansy was full on scheming. And she was the target. Pansy made no attempt to hide her intentions.

So Daphne was in and she was out. She must have upset Pansy somehow, or maybe this was about Draco. In a nutshell, she didn't care. It wouldn't worry her a bit if she became a persona non grata, provided she had a baby. Pansy could have Draco. Actually it might work out for the best if that is how it went. She'd have the baby and Draco was otherwise distracted. Maybe that would be enough to then get her out of going to these events, particularly if Draco's mistress was constantly there.

She wasn't so sure Draco was that into Pansy though. She wouldn't be trying so hard if she had him and she obviously didn't. Whatever, their antics was boring her.

If Pansy was declaring war, Astoria probably would too. Hermione had the feeling that Astoria wasn't useless in girl war. Neither a talent nor inclination that Hermione had. Whatever.

She walked around and looked for Draco. A girl came up to her, someone who looked familiar from school, but she couldn't put a name on the face.

“He is waiting for you in the library.” The girl said with a sly smile. “He told me to tell you.”

“Oh, ok, thanks.” Hermione said.

She walked off to find the library wondering what could be so important that he wanted to see her there. Maybe he couldn’t wait till they got home, she thought with a sly smile.

It took a couple of attempts but the library was unmistakable. It was pretty impressive, not as impressive as the Malfoy one, but she was still not spoiled enough to not be impressed.

“Draco?” She called. But heard nothing. She closed the door and walked further into the library.

She jumped slightly as she saw a figure leaning against a desk. It wasn’t Draco, it was Theo Nott and he had two drinks in his hand. He had set this up. The girl was talking about him and not Draco. How could she have been so stupid.

“Why Miss Astoria, what are you doing here?” He said teasingly.

“Its Mrs. Malfoy actually.” She said. “I thought we covered this last time.”

“Oh, don’t be such a sprig.” He said. “Just thought it would be nice to have a little catch up.”

“I have to go.” Hermione said and turned to leave.

Theo was on her in a second flat. Were all the slytherins this fast, Hermione wondered. He had turned her around and was pulling her towards him by her wrists.

“No seriously Nott, let go.” She demanded. “Whatever was going on here, its over.”

“I know you don’t mean that.” He practically cooed.

Her affirmation that she did died on her lips as the door swung open, revealing Draco standing there staring at them.

“No.” She said pointing at him. “This is not that.”

Draco turned and left.

“Draco!” She called after him. She ran after him, but he was already out of the hall.

“Arrgh.” Hermione gave into her frustration. She called after him again but he was gone. She got to the main hall where everyone was but didn’t see him anywhere.

Instead she saw Pansy and Daphne looking at her. Pansy put her hand up to her mouth and mouthed an ‘Oops’. Pansy didn’t look surprised at all. Hermione was pretty sure Pansy had some hand in this. Maybe she even had some hand in Astoria’s and Nott relationship. She wouldn’t put it past her. Bitch.

Hermione went to the entrance hall and apparated home. Draco wasn’t in either his study or his bedroom. A room Hermione had never been in.

She went back to her bed room and sat down. This was not the way it was supposed to go. Draco had looked so angry at the library door. But not surprised. It must have looked so bad

her being pulled up close to Nott. Hermione wanted to swear every curse word she knew. She was just getting Draco to come around, mostly unwillingly but allowing her to manipulate him. She knew full well that he has been allowing her to seduce him. But now, things were much worse. Pansy had ruined the tentative steps she had made with him.

Hermione wasn't sure how she could salvage this. Draco wouldn't sleep with her now, or probably for a long time. He probably wouldn't let her near him again.

Hermione felt really bad. She was completely innocent, but she knew Draco had been hurt. He hid it with anger, but there had been disappointment on his face too. How could she have been so stupid?

She waited a couple of hours and then tried to seek him out again. His bedroom door was locked, so he was home.

"Draco." She said as she knocked on the door. "We need to talk. What you saw. It wasn't what you thought." She sounded like every adulterer on the planet.

"I swear." She continued. "I thought it was you. Someone said you were waiting for me in the library, but it wasn't you. Nothing happened."

She was met by complete silence.

"Damn it Draco. Let me explain." She said, but again nothing. She tried to hear him inside but it was completely silent. She realised that he might have put a silencing charm on the door.

How the fuck was she going to fix this? She sat down and leaned on the door. She felt so bad for him. According to him he got screwed over again. This was her fault, she was stupid. Her stupidity had let this happen. Draco would probably retreat more into his hard shell now. The chances of him being intimate with her now were probably nil.

Sitting here at his door wasn't achieving anything. She went back to her room. She would have to talk to him in the morning.

He wasn't there in the morning. She looked for him at breakfast, which was a really tense affair. Obviously the older Malfoys were aware of the previous night's happenings. Draco wasn't in his study or his bedroom. She would just have to wait for him. She waited in his study.

It was very quiet without him there. A very dark room, with dark furniture. Very tidy. This room filled with the things he treasured. There were some Quidditch things in one of the bookcases and some Hogwarts things. She had the feeling he really liked Hogwarts. Probably quite exciting after living in this large and lonely house all his life.

She wondered what it was like to know every aspect of your life. He would live and die in this house. Go to parties every other night for the rest of his life. Hogwarts was probably the only time he had away from here and the restraining expectations on him. And then he ended up in an atrocious marriage.

She groaned again at the awfulness of the situation.

After looking around the study some more, she noticed that copy of the Daily Prophet, the one with her picture on it from the day after she died. It was back on the same position on the

desk, from before Pansy had thrown it away. Why in the world would he be holding onto that?

Hermione didn't have a chance to consider it anymore, because someone came into the room. Hermione prepared herself for what was about to come, but it wasn't Draco. It was some older man in business robes.

"Who are you?" Hermione asked without thinking.

"I am Sanderson." He said looking at her suspiciously. "Horatio Sanderson. The Malfoys' solicitor. We have met on several occasions."

"Head injury." Hermione said in a way of explaining her odd behaviour. "I have some memory loss."

"Oh." The man said and put his bag down on the desk carefully as if trying not to scare her.

"Draco isn't here." She said.

"I came to speak to you." He said with a careful smile.

"Oh?" Hermione said with surprise.

"It seems that Mr. Malfoy has decided that it is time for a separation."

"Separation?" She asked.

"Between the two of you." The man carefully explained. "He feels there are some differences that are making it impossible for you to live together."

Hermione gasped, but closed her mouth. She couldn't blame him really. It ruined things for her, but she couldn't blame him.

"Perhaps we can work on improving the situation." She said.

The solicitor looked down, "Mr. Malfoy doesn't seem to want to do that."

This was not what she wanted. It sounded awful, but it would ruin her plan. She knew she could make things better for Malfoy, but he had to let her.

"There are a number of properties that you could take up residence in." He continued. "He is making a generous allowance."

Hermione felt her hand up to try to stop him. She had to think, this was happening too fast.

"I.." She started.

"He would like to you vacate Malfoy Manor by this afternoon." The solicitor said. "All your things will be forwarded to whichever residence you choose."

"I don't want to go." Hermione said, her mind still reeling from the sudden change in her circumstances.

"He is quite insistent." The man said.

Hermione accepted that she would have to leave. She couldn't see a way around it.

“I need some cash.” She said. She hated saying it, but she did.

“I will send some over this shortly.” The man said. “In the meantime, a vault will be set up at Gringotts for your use.”

Hermione didn’t care. She didn’t want Malfoy’s money. If they were separating, she didn’t want anything from him. But she couldn’t get by without some cash.

“I am sorry to be a bearer of such bad tidings.” The man said with another smile. He was a good solicitor, kind, Hermione thought. She just nodded and he was gone.

Hermione sat down stunned for a while. It had all gone sideways too fast. But she guessed that she shouldn’t have been surprised. The eventually that she had a life with Draco Malfoy was absurd. He would never be with the likes of her, wittingly or not, it just fundamentally was an impossibility. Maybe the fabric of the universe was objecting.

Hermione waited back in her room until she got a pouch full of cash. He hated taking it but she didn’t have a choice. There was nothing of Astoria’s stuff she wanted.

Hermione floo’d to the Leaky Cauldron. It seemed to always be a point of safety when lost. And she was completely lost. She had lost her life, she had lost Astoria’s life. She had lost her chance of a baby unless there was an off chance that she was already pregnant. But she doubted it. She had nothing but her wand, the clothes on her back and a pouch full of galleons she didn’t want.

Chapter 12

Chapter 12

Hermione was completely disorientated when she woke up. She was getting used to waking up at Malfoy Manor. She groaned when she remembered what happened the day before. She didn't know what to do now. The Malfoys had offered her one of their properties to live in, but she didn't want it.

She decided that it was either all or nothing. She would either be part of the family or she would not. She wasn't going to be some black sheep that they stowed away somewhere as they expected. She wasn't sure what this meant, but she suspected it was a separation. Divorce was practically unheard of, but it wasn't sure if it was a complete impossibility.

Again she had things looking like they were going in the right direction just to have it yanked away again. Maybe that was right, maybe that was just how things were, because things didn't go her way. No matter how hard she tried, things just didn't work out. She was smart and she tried her best, why was that never enough? Why did everything have to be so hard?

She sat in her room at the Leaky Cauldron, not knowing what to do now. She had to review her options. Reconciliation with Draco might not really be an option. He had kicked her out, he had probably changed the wards on the Manor by now to ensure she couldn't return.

Kicking her out was a big move, it was a permanent statement. Not a little bickering. Everyone would be aware and Astoria would likely be shunned as was typical of disgraced wives. Usually considered abject failures or fundamentally unsavoury. So there would be no more invites to parties and events. Not that Hermione minded. She was damaged goods now, to be quietly and discreetly stashed away somewhere. She wondered if she was expected to run into the arms of Theo Nott. Is that what Astoria expected, or did she think she could go on like she was?

She wondered if this was some kind of punishment by the Malfoys. She would be left out in the cold for a while until she got the message loud and clear that she needed to behave. Somehow she didn't think so, maybe if Draco had kicked her out personally with a few speeches about how inappropriate her behaviour was, but he hadn't he had refused to have anything to do with her. That was pretty telling.

It didn't matter, it was done now. A second life she had completely screwed up. Guess she had to start thinking about life number three. Staying as part of the Malfoy family wasn't an option. She was still married to Draco and his only option for an heir unless he managed to divorce her. If anyone had the power and influence to do it, it would be the Malfoys. But she wasn't sure Draco would be all that motivated. He didn't seem to have any particular feelings for any woman that would drive him to seek freedom.

It might be easier for them to keep her somewhere, where Draco would come around once a month in an attempt to knock her up, then to take the child away to raise. That was not an option she would even consider. He did literally have the power to imprison her. That would be cruel and she wasn't exactly sure that Draco wasn't up for a bit of cruelty, history has shown he was very good at it.

Being a shunned married woman would really limit her opportunities. No one would employ her. Most women in her situation would have to depend on their husband or potentially their family, but she didn't have any family left.

She needed to decide on a plan, in case it came down to them restricting her movements. She needed to talk to Harry. And that could go very badly.

Harry would be going to work this morning. The best place to catch him would be at the Ministry. She decided that was her plan of action. She didn't have any clothes to change into, she didn't even have a toothbrush.

She had to endure two hours of suspicious looks outside the Aurors department before Harry came out. It looked like he was going somewhere.

"Harry," she called, "can I speak to you?"

"Greengrass?" He said surprised. "Sorry, Mrs. Malfoy."

"Can we talk for a minute?" She asked.

Harry looked around, he seemed unsure what to do.

"There is a conference room down the hall here. I'm not sure if its free, but we can have a look." He said and she followed him down the hall.

It was so good to be with Harry again, she had missed him.

"This really strange thing happened involving Hermione." Hermione started, trying to figure out how she was going to go about this. "See, she died."

"I know that." Harry said shortly.

"But something went wrong. She... I ended up in another body. This body."

Harry narrowed his eyes. "Hermione ended up in your body?"

"I know it sound crazy, but its true." Hermione said, fearing his response.

"So Hermione is in you." He said plainly like he was talking to a child.

"Its me Harry, I am in this body." She said. "I have no idea how it happened, but I'm in here, I woke up in this body."

"And you share this body with Astoria?" He said. Hermione knew that Harry didn't believe her, but he would listen. It was part of his training if nothing else.

"Actually, I don't know where Astoria is, she isn't in here as far as I can tell."

Harry was thinking, she could practically see the wheels churning in his head. He was trying to think of intentions that would include this scenario. He would hear her out, waiting

for her to talk herself into revealing whatever it was she was after. Or he would determine that she was completely loony.

“And where is your husband?” He asked after a while.

“Draco?” She asked. “He kicked me out.”

Harry nodded. He was still looking for the punch line.

“Like me and Malfoy could ever co-exist.” She said with a snort. Actually she knew she was lying, the co-existed quite nicely for about five minutes.

“Did he hurt you?” Harry asked carefully.

“No!” She said. “Its not... He isn’t important. Its me Harry. I’m in here. Me, the girl you went to school with for seven years, the one you spent a year in a tent with. I like U2. I like cheeseburgers. I walked in on you having a wank in the shower at the Burrow that time, remember.”

This made Harry cough.

“I know you think I could have stolen all these memories, Harry.” She continued. “But I have them all and I have none of hers.”

“Who’s?”

“Astoria’s.”

“And what do you want?” Harry said.

“I just needed to talk to you.” She said. “I am going to leave, I think.”

“Leave?”

“The wizard world.” She said. “I am going back to the muggle world for a while.”

“Hermione’s parents are dead.” He said.

“I know that Harry.” She said a little too loudly. “It was me they called from the emergency room.”

It was quiet for a while.

“Say I believe you.” Harry said. “What do you want from me?”

“I don’t know Harry.” She said. “I’ve got no one now. I just needed to talk to you. Let you know that I was alright. I just needed someone to know I was still here.”

“Maybe you just picked up some of her memories somehow.” He said.

“Maybe.” Hermione said. “But its complete. I don’t know what happened, I can’t explain it. Maybe I am just a copy of her memories, but I have the complete set. Everything in my consciousness is Hermione. All my memories, all my thoughts, all my knowledge.”

“This doesn’t make sense.” He said.

“Do you believe me?” She asked.

Harry didn't answer. "Its best that you don't tell anyone." He said.

Hermione nodded.

"Do you need anything?" He asked. "Money?"

"No, the Malfoy's gave me a pouch as a parting gift." She said and held it up to show.

"And where are you going?"

"I don't know yet." She said. "I can't stay here."

"Why?" He said and the suspicion was right back in his eyes.

"To be Malfoy's little cast off wife, no thanks." She said. "Time to go."

"Back to the muggle world." He said.

"Yeah."

"Hermione wouldn't go to the muggle world, she loved the wizard world." He said. She was really sick of people telling her that what she was doing wasn't anything like her.

"That was before I was Malfoy's wife." She yelled. "That has somewhat changed things."

"Alright, point taken." He said. "When are you going?"

"Now." She said. "Right after this. Harry, can you ask around the Department of Mysteries if they can shed any light on what has happened to me."

The silence prevailed for a while. "I'll see if I can find someone to ask." He said after a while. "Let me know where you are."

The conversation had that done feeling. He didn't believe her but he would give her the benefit of a doubt until he found proof otherwise.

She hugged him tightly for a while and it seemed to take him by surprise.

"I'm so tall now." She said. "Not a bad body, huh? These boobs are huge. They get in the way constantly."

Harry tried not to look at her chest.

"I can have a baby now." She said, conveying something that was very important but realising that sounded quite mental. "Only with Draco though due to the marriage terms and that doesn't look like its going to work out. Anyway, it beats being dead. When is Ron's wedding?"

"A couple of weeks." Harry said.

Hermione was quiet for a while. She felt like the ultimate outsider.

"Best not to tell him any of this." Harry said. "He wouldn't understand."

Hermione nodded again. She knew it was true, but she also knew that Harry was trying to protect his friend from the loony woman.

"He seems happy." She said.

“He is.”

“I better go.”

“Yeah.” Harry said. “Owl me and let me know where you are. Let me know if you need anything.”

Hermione smiled and said she would. He would say that to anyone. Even if he suspected they were trying to deceive him.

It could have gone better, it would have gone much worse. At least she had a line of communication open, even if he never believed her.

Hermione walked out of the Ministry and down to the money changers. She changed all the money into muggle pounds. Time to go.

Chapter 13

Chapter 13

Hermione spent another night at the Leaky Cauldron, but staying there was only going to burn through her money. She had to go back to the muggle world. She would never get a job here and she certainly wasn't going to depend on the Malfoys. She was a grown capable woman, she didn't need to live off charity. That might not be how they saw it, but it was how she saw it.

It kind of hurt that Harry didn't believe her. She completely understood, but it still hurt how have your friends doubt you. She wasn't sure he would do as she asked, but Harry usually did what was asked of him. That was just how he was and she loved him for it.

She needed to do some research as well, there was nothing in the Malfoy library, that didn't mean there was nothing anywhere else. But first she needed to sort her situation. She needed to get a place, which shouldn't be too hard.

Actually it took two days of traipsing around town to get the lease on a one bed flat in Angel. It wasn't the nicest flat, not as nice as her old flat, but it was a roof over her head. Paying the bond and the advance took most of the money she had. The agent gave her the key and left Hermione to it. She had nothing to move in, she had nothing. The first thing she did was to get a mattress, a jug and a coffee cup. Anything else could wait.

She went to an internet cafe to forge a CV. It was unremarkable enough that no one would ever suspect it's a forgery. She applied for near on fifty jobs, and got three interviews. One she wanted and the other two she'd take if it was offered.

It took a week and a bit before she secured a job in a WHSmiths Bookshop down by Victoria Cross. She was happy with it, a bookstore was perfect. She knew books and the manager had been pretty impressed with her knowledge. The pay was nothing to brag about, but it would pay her rent plus a bit extra.

Every night she lay on her mattress and wondered if she had made the right decision. She hated feeling uncertain, but she was pretty sure she didn't want to haunt one of the Malfoys' properties like a ghost.

She mailed a letter to Harry through the Ministry muggle mail address which links to the owl postal service. She got a owled short reply acknowledging her letter. It was short and professional. The same he would send to any loony he came across.

It was actually nice to work again. The days went quick and she didn't mind that it was a pretty mindless job. She was used to a dead end job, but this time she didn't have expectations to disappoint her.

Over time she managed to buy the things she needed, including a couch, a TV and computer and a microwave. She realised there was remarkably little she needed. She was

pretty happy, but lonely. The weekends were particularly so. She would read and go for walks. But the events that had passed played on her mind constantly.

She got her period and she cried pretty much the whole day. She even burst into tears when a customer asked if they sold stamps. She was used to the disappointment, she had learnt to not have her hopes up. Eventually she was able to shake herself out of it.

It was something being in Astoria's body. Jeans looked fantastic on her. Men were practically falling over on the street when she walked past. It was astonishing at first, but got kind of annoying. Men acted funny around her, either they would clam up or they would turn into macho arseholes.

She did wonder how Malfoy was getting on. She wondered if people were asking him what happened to his wife. Everyone would know, of course. Pansy would see to that if nothing else. Maybe he had sought consolation in her willing arms. She hoped not, Pansy didn't deserve to get what she was after.

It must have been embarrassing for him to have a failed marriage. He wasn't the first person it had happened to, but it was still quite a scandal when it did. It's not like he was heart broken, he hated Astoria. But he didn't take embarrassment well. Hermione knew this, knew how he reacted whenever she'd tried her very best to embarrass him at school. She'd done a fairly good job of it too.

Another week had passed and Hermione had a long weekend ahead of her. She decided that maybe she needed to explore the death angle with someone who had first hand experience, and sought out the only person she knew.

Nearly Headless Nick was surprised to have a visitor. The ghosts rarely got visitors specifically for them. She sat in the library and waited for him. The smell of the place was nearly overwhelming. She had loved this place so much. Her entire life had been ahead of her and even though things seemed bleak there was always hope for a bright future. She wasn't so sure how much hope she had left these days. It was a painful commodity.

"You look familiar." Nearly Headless Nick said when he arrived, "But I don't recall your time here specifically."

"Well, you probably won't believe this, but it's Hermione Granger, I have changed bodies." She said.

"Oh." He said. "Did your one not suit you?"

This was not the answer that Hermione expected and it gave her pause.

"I died." She said.

"I heard."

"Then I woke up in this body."

"And you wish to return it?"

"Can I go back?" She asked feeling a shiver of hope.

“No.” He said. “Your body wouldn’t be suitable anymore. Its been a while and they don’t fare well on their own.”

Hermione felt the sting of disappointment, but shook herself out of it. Actually it was really nice that someone accepted what she was saying at face value.

“Do you know what’s happened to me?” She said.

“No, what’s happened?” He asked like she was telling her a secret.

“I mean why I am in this body.” She said. “Do you know how this happened? People don’t usually walk around in other bodies.”

“It is unusual.” He said contemplatively and put his fingers together in a triangle. Hermione wondered if he was copying Dumbledore.

“How did it happen?” She said, she was getting a little frustrated.

“Well, what happened when you died?”

“I don’t know.” She said. “I remember the chimney falling on me and then a bit of pain, a few flashes and then I woke up in this body.”

“A chimney, not a bad way to go. Quick.” He said like he enjoyed talking about the topic. “You don’t remember seeking the body out?”

“No?”

“Do the dead seek out other bodies?”

“Rarely, but it can happen.” He said. “There are many advantages to having a body. But it would be very powerful magic. He-who-must-not-be-named invaded other bodies. He did it with Quirrel.”

“I didn’t seek out this body.” She said.

“Then maybe it was done for you.” He said.

“Someone would have done this to me?” She said with shock, her mind whirling. ‘Why?’ Who in the world would have done this. Malfoy? Does he hate me that much? It doesn’t make sense, why would he do this, so he can have atrociously bad sex with me and then kick me out?”

Nick was looking at her with horror. She guessed she had said that out loud.

“What about Astoria?” She asked.

“She’s dead.” Nick said with certainty.

“Are you sure?”

“You would definitely know if you were sharing her body with her. She would be stronger than you and likely you would have a face sticking out of the back of your head.”

Hermione didn’t really want to know what he meant, but checked the back of her head with her hand before she knew what she was going. Astoria was definitely not in the body then.

"It is unlikely you would have gained entry into a body with a soul." He said as if explaining it to someone dense. "She would have been gone by the time you arrived."

"But how did I arrive?" Hermione said. "If someone set this up, it would have been very dark magic. Killed me, and killed her to make this happen."

"Well, not necessarily." He said. "It would be very dark magic if that was the case. Dark magic is based on emotion. Hate, fear, jealousy. Strong emotion is powerful. Emotions makes things happen and Dark Magic feeds on this. But it could have been unintentional, emotions acting without intent."

"What do you mean unintentionally?" She said. "Now in the world could this happen unintentionally?"

"Maybe it was just a co-incidence." He said. "Sometimes the living draw the dead."

She wasn't sure what he was saying.

"Often when a family member dies, the family or a member of the family will draw the spirit to them." He said. "It is a natural process. People grieve and they draw the spirit, it sets up a conduit away from the normal conduit to the place beyond. Eventually the emotion settles and the spirit returns to its path."

"Place beyond?"

"Where we all go." He said. "Are supposed to go. Some of us don't for whatever reason. Strong emotions make people stay, like I did."

"But I didn't feel anything."

"Maybe someone else did and drew you." He said. "And in this case there was a body for you to enter."

"But that doesn't make sense. I don't have any family, maybe if it was Harry or Ron, but the Malfoys, that's a bit far fetched." She said. "I barely knew Astoria and Draco can't tolerate me."

"Astoria was gone by this time." He said. "It wasn't her. Perhaps Draco is the one you need to look at."

"That's ridiculous. I haven't had anything to do with him for years, I can't believe he would hate me this much that he would draw me."

"Perhaps he didn't. True hate, emotional hate is rare." Nick said. "Perhaps, in essence, he wished for you and you just happened to be available to be drawn by it. Strong emotions, Miss Granger."

"That's not possible." She said, but her stomach flipped and she was feeling tingling all over her body. That wasn't even close to being possible, but it felt like there was something there, something that begged to be explored.

"All sorts of things are possible." He said. "I'm sorry, I can't be of more help. There are no records or proof you can refer to when it comes to what happens after death."

Nick glid off and left Hermione with this mess of concepts clogging up her head. She felt like she had gridlock in her head.

It wasn't possible that Draco could have wished for her. Why would he wish for her? Maybe for the same reason he kept her picture on his desk, something in the back of her mind said. That was ridiculous, impossible. She'd had nothing to do with him for years. The only emotion he'd ever had for her was hate, distaste maybe. Nothing strong enough to justify this, but she couldn't help but feel every cell in her body tingle.

Chapter 14

Chapter 14

Time got on pretty slowly in the muggle world. Hermione worked, bought stuff she needed and did a bit of travel. But she was having trouble making friends. She went out with the people from work and that was fun, but it was the kind of friendship that was just a step beyond acquaintances.

She hadn't been back to the wizard world. She wanted to give herself a chance at settling in the muggle world and also she didn't want whatever attention Astoria would get if she went back. Surely people would have noticed her absence. The worst possible outcome would be that reporters started asking her questions. She wouldn't put it past them. She hated reporters.

She had been back in the muggle world for around 6 months. It wasn't bad. She liked it, there was so much going on in the muggle world, although she was lonely.

One night while watching a documentary on the Viking invasions of Britain, she was distracted by an owl at her window. It made her jump because she hadn't expected it, she had gotten out of the habit of expecting large birds scratching at her window.

It was from Harry as she expected because no one else knew where she was.

Apparently the Malfoys were looking for her, the letter said. Harry wrote that he thought she should know that they were trying to track her down.

Hermione didn't know why they were looking for her. She doubted it would be for a divorce, people of their standing didn't divorce. Hermione wondered whether she should get in touch, but decided against it. They wanted something and she was pretty sure she would be the one that would end up worse off.

It could be something silly like they just wanted her to sign something, but probably they just wanted control over her, maybe use her to incubate the next Malfoy heir. She was not going to have a baby to have it taken away. Somehow she didn't see Draco forgiving Astoria's indiscretions so they could play happy family together.

No, she decided, better off having an actual life here. She tossed the note away and decided to forget about it. Her resolution to focus on the muggle world was strengthened. One of the girls at work had invited her on a Hens night in Prague in a couple of weeks, which was a step in the right direction. That is what normal people did, go on benders with their friends in a foreign country to celebrate the fact that singledom was over. Normal was good, it worked for millions of people.

And someone liked her enough to invite her to such a rite of passage. She hadn't been on one since Ginny was getting married. And this one, judging from the girl getting married would be much more fun.

Hermione felt proud of her accomplishments. She suspected that the manager was eyeing her up for the assistant manager role too, once the current one goes on maternity leave.

Hermione was trying really hard to not think about babies. She just had to get used to it that she was not going to be a mother. She had done it before, she would do it again. But it felt like a stab in the heart every time she saw the assistant manager's growing belly.

She was making an attempt to like the shopping too. Shopping wasn't difficult with this body, everything looked good on it. It was a time consuming distraction, and she had everything she needed now, so she had a bit of money to do it. Well, as much as she could tolerate anyway.

In fact she had just bought a pair of boots and was carting her shopping home to her little flat. It was dark, but the streets were still really lively with people going out, going home, everyone going somewhere. She liked the constant bustle of London.

She was thinking about getting a cat. It would be nice to have someone to come home to, she thought as she unlocked the door to the dark second story flat. The heat was on, and Hermione loved coming home to a nicely warm flat. She had hung up some Christmas lights in the window which was the only light in her flat, but she loved the sparkle of the tiny lights. It reminded her of Christmas with her family.

She was startled by a figure sitting in her chair. She dropped her bag in shock and got an adrenalin rush from the fright.

On closer inspection, she identified that it was Narcissa Malfoy.

"You scared the living daylights out of me." Hermione said. Anger flooded her following the fright. "You could have called out."

"I didn't think of it." Narcissa said. "It was not my intention of frightening you."

"Well, you did a good job of it anyway." Hermione said and turned to the light switch.

"Ah," Narcissa said. "I was wondering how you lived in this place. There are no candles."

"No," Hermione said. "We prefer bulbs." Her head snapped around at a movement on the other side of the room. It was Draco with his back turned to her. His usual black robes. His hair in such extreme contrast with his clothes.

"We?" Narcissa asked.

"People living in the muggle world." Hermione said tearing her eyes away from Draco who was examining her iPod.

"I thought you understood that we offered you a house with sufficient facilities for your comfort." Narcissa said.

"I felt the need for a bit more hustle and bustle." Hermione said.

"So you decided to try living in the muggle world?" Narcissa said with distaste. "Quite a little rebellion."

Hermione stopped herself from rolling her eyes. Astoria would never go into the muggle world, so her behaviour must be a mystery to Narcissa.

“We all have our moments of subversion, I suspect.” Narcissa said haughtily.

Hermione gritted her teeth.

“But now comes the time to think about our responsibility.” Narcissa continued. “And your responsibility lies with your family. Sufficient time has passed now, it is time to start thinking about a reconciliation.”

“Perhaps.” Hermione said. “I will certainly think it over.” She hoped like hell that was enough to make them go away.

“Well, you can think it over at home.” Narcissa said. Hermione was pretty sure she wasn’t referring to the home they were all standing in. “Draco is a good boy. He knows what is expected of him and he is ready to forgive you.”

“Maybe it would be better to take it a little slower.” Hermione said trying to work through her dry mouth. She was pretty sure Draco was not ready for forgiveness. “Maybe a gradual re-acquaintance would be more successful.” Actually, Hermione was thinking more along the lines of emigrating to Australia.

“Don’t be silly.” Narcissa said. “Your place is with your husband.”

Hermione got a moments panic that Narcissa was reading her thoughts, but dismissed it. “He will see you home, where you belong so we can all put this nonsense behind us.” With that she walked into the hall and apparated.

That left her alone with Draco in the small flat in London. She wondered what kind of barrage of duty lectures Draco had been enduring at home. He probably had six months of it and he had finally given in to reconciling with his wayward wife. Hermione felt sorry for him.

“How did you find me?” She asked him as he was leaning on her bookcase. There was only one person who knew where she was and he would never reveal it.

“Saint Potter sold you out.” He said. Hermione was shocked.

“He wouldn’t.” She said adamantly.

“He did.” He said watching her intently. “Being an auror, he is compelled to comply with a court order.”

Hermione felt her whole body flush. She felt hurt that Harry had betrayed her, even though she knew intellectually that he had to comply with a court order to reveal her location. But a court order had to be specific, so they must have known that Harry knew. She doubted that the Malfoy’s would assume that Harry knew.

“How did you know that Harry knew where I was?” She asked.

“There were some questions with regards to your wellbeing.” Draco said dryly, still watching her like she was going to bolt or pull her wand. “To the point where the authorities were being appealed to.”

Hermione guessed that people assumed that the Malfoys had done something bad to her as she suddenly disappeared. If Malfoy’s wife disappeared after a fight, she would have assumed

the worst too. Probably was that not a lot of people would put it past them to get rid of her.

“Harry revealed that he knew you were fine.” Draco said. “A petition to the court and he had to reveal your location. You should have made him a secret keeper. Not even a court order would dissolve that obligation.”

Hermione felt annoyed being preached to about how magic works.

“So, now your little escapades are over.” He said.

“Draco, we both know that we are better apart.” She said. She had kind of accepted that her mental idea what she could have a nice fulfilling life with Draco Malfoy was the dumbest pipe dream anyone had ever thought of.

“Well, that doesn’t matter, darling.” He said. “You just have to lie in the bed you’ve made.”

I didn’t make this bed, she wanted to scream. Hermione knew he had his wand at the ready and hers was in her bag. It would probably take her two minutes to dig it out.

“Funny thing though.” He said. “The first person my wife runs to when in trouble is Harry Potter, the wonder boy. Why is that?”

Hermione didn’t say anything. She could proclaim that she was Hermione Granger like she had so many times in the past. He didn’t believe her. But Astoria would not seek out Harry help, no matter what. Maybe this was some ploy to get her committed to St. Mungus’ mental ward. She got an image of Lockhart telling her how fabulous that magnificent man in the mirror was.

“Lets go... *wife*.” He said and grabbed her by the arm as he apparated them.

Chapter 15

Chapter 15

"Let go of me right now!" Hermione demanded as they arrived at Malfoy Manor, but Draco wouldn't, he dragged her to his study and locked the door.

"Where is your wand?" He asked and he rummaged through his desk.

She wouldn't answer. It was in the bag she dropped when Narcissa made her jump. He grabbed her by the neck and popped the cork off a vial in his other hand. Hermione fought as he shoved it into her mouth.

"Drink it!" He yelled. Hermione spat it out, but it wouldn't do any good. She recognised the taste of veritas serum.

"Get your hands off me!" She demanded.

"Who are you?" He yelled back. "Where's my wife?"

"I told you who I was but you didn't believe me." Hermione defended herself.

"Is that you in there, Granger?" He demanded. "Did you steal my wife's body?"

"Yes, I mean no." Hermione started. The pressure of Draco's hand on her neck was getting really painful. "Take your hands off me."

"Not until I know what the fuck you are up to." He said sharply.

"I'm not up to anything." She said. "This just happened."

"Did you murder my wife?" He asked.

"No!" Hermione responded. "She was gone. Apparently. I don't know. It's what I've been told."

"Told by whom?"

"Nearly Headless Nick."

"The Gryffindor Ghost?"

"Yes."

"What interest would a ghost have in this?"

"No interest, I just asked him for advice." She said. "You are choking me."

Draco increased the pressure on her neck.

"What have you done with my wife?"

"I didn't do anything." She croaked. "She died."

The pressure eased somewhat on her neck when realisation sunk in.

“Did you kill my wife, Granger?” He said quietly and coldly.

“No, she was already gone by the time I... showed up.”

“Who killed her?” He said and the pressure on her neck increased.

“I don’t know. I don’t think anybody did. I think she hit her head in the bathroom and just died in her sleep.”

“And co-incidentally you showed up in her body. I don’t buy it for one second, Granger.” He spat. “Is Potter in on this?”

“No!” She said. “He doesn’t even believe me.”

“What about Nott? Did you organise this with Nott.”

“Nott?” She said. “No Nott is Astoria’s business.”

He was quiet for a second.

“I caught you with him.” He said after a while.

“That was something Pansy set up.” Hermione said.

“What does Pansy have to do with this?”

“I’m not sure, she organised that you would catch Astoria and Nott.”

“Pansy wouldn’t do that.” He said.

“I’m pretty sure she would.” Hermione said. “I suspect that she had a hand in Astoria’s and Nott’s relationship all along. But I don’t know, I wasn’t there.”

“Pansy wouldn’t be capable of this.” He said. “Nott maybe, but not this.”

“Did nearly Nearly Headless Nick help you do this?” He resumed on track with his interrogation.

“No.” Hermione said.

“Then who?” Draco demanded with even more pressure. Hermione clawed at his arms but he was incredibly strong. Much stronger than she would have ever given him credit for. Hermione wouldn’t answer.

“I command you to answer.” He said appealing to the veritas serum coursing through her.

“You did.”

“Liar!”

“You called for me.” She said.

“I didn’t.” He yelled.

“I was dead and you wished for me, so I was drawn here and there happened to be a vacant body available, so here I am.” Hermione said. “I obviously have no memory of it, I just woke

up here.”

“I don’t believe you.” He said but she saw uncertainty.

“So you’re dead.” He said. “It was your body that was buried? Or was it someone else?”

“It was me, mine.” She said. “I’m dead and you caused me to detour from wherever it was I was supposed to go.”

“That’s ridiculous.” He said but the uncertainty as there in his features. “And what is your purpose?”

“I don’t have a purpose.”

“Why did you seduce me?” He said quietly. The pressure went back on her throat, but she refused to answer.

“Why?” He repeated louder this time. Hermione ignored him again, but the veritas serum was burning her from the inside.

“Answer me.” He commanded.

“Because I am barren.” She finally spat out. She closed her eyes with the humiliation. It was something she didn’t want to admit to, especially with him, who had been so insistent that she was an aberration of nature. Her barrenness only gave credence to the philosophy.

“So you decided to fuck me?” He said incredulously.

“You were the only option.” She said. “I had this new body which was capable and you were the only option.”

“So this is some kind of sick ploy to get in my pants?” He said viciously.

“No!” Hermione yelled.

“Really, because you were kind of begging for it, Granger.” He said. “What? The Weasel wasn’t able to give you a good one, so you had to seek out someone who could?”

“You’re revolting.” Hermione spat.

“You didn’t seem to think so a few months back.” He almost teased. “I always knew you wanted me.”

“Please.” Hermione said with sharpness. “You literally were the last man on earth due to that stupid marriage clause.”

“And you suffered for the cause, is it?” He said.

“Yes.” Hermione said. She wasn’t sure how that managed to come out through the veritas serum. On some level she believed it, on the other hand, she was aware that she had enjoyed that particular sacrifice a little too much. He seemed to be aware of this too.

“You’re a whore, just like her.” He said and finally released her.

Hermione massaged her objecting throat.

"I am nothing like her." Hermione stated. "And don't tell me you didn't care about her. You practically strangled me with concern that someone had murdered her."

"She is a Malfoy and no matter what, we take care of our own." He spat.

"You kicked her out." Hermione challenged.

Draco huffed and refused to answer.

"So now I am stuck with you, is that it?" He said.

Hermione didn't answer, it wasn't something she was ready to accept or acknowledge. If there was a way out of this, she still wanted to find it.

"Well, congratulations Granger, you finally managed to become someone in this society, even though you had to steal it." He said and walked towards the door.

"I didn't do this, Draco." She yelled after him. "You did."

She heard his footsteps retreating down the hall.

"Well, that went well." She said to an empty room. At least she had someone who believed her. Although she suspected he still believed that she had done this for some nefarious reason.

She had a quick look around the room. Her photo was still on his desk. He had some issue with her, she recognised. He had been uncertain when she said he had wished for her. It was a sheer impossibility that he had feelings for her. He certainly didn't act like it, calling her a whore and the like. He really was a pig, by the way.

Hermione walked back to her room. She didn't know what else to do. Her things from her apartment were all there, including the bag with her wand. Hermione sighed with relief.

Red the elf was carting thing about.

"The Master has said that you should stay here for the time being." The elf said apologetically.

"What does that mean?" Hermione asked with exasperation.

"He has adjusted the wards." The elf said.

"To keep me in." She finished for him. "The bastard."

The elf cringed, bowed and popped away. Hermione released another bone wracking sigh. Back here, she thought to herself. Things were finally starting to work in the muggle world. She threw herself on the large bed and just lay there staring at the roof.

After a while a soft knock on the door told her someone was there. It sure wasn't Draco, he wouldn't softly knock.

"Come in." She said after a moment's hesitation.

Harry's head popped through the door.

"You." She said and grabbed the bag on her bed. 'You are the suckiest friend ever.' She said and started to swat him with the bag. "You totally sold me out."

"I had to, they had a court order." He said. "I would lose my job."

"Oh." She said with indignity. 'There's the Gryffindor spirit.' She yelled. "I am going to tell Ginny on you. No, I am going to tell Molly." She said with gravitas. "She will send you a Howler at work, so everyone can see what a crappy friend you are."

"I'm sorry." He said. "I didn't have a choice. And you kind of are his wife."

"I am not." She said with indignity, but knew that technically it was a lie.

"What am I going to do, Harry?"

"I don't know, Mione." He said.

"Do you believe me?" She asked.

"Nobody beats me like you do. No one would dare, except maybe Ginny."

"Ha,ha." She said. "You really did deserve it."

"I can accept that." He said. "I really didn't have a choice. I am compelled to tell the truth in a professional capacity."

"Well I will keep that in mind, if I ever have to run away in someone else's body again."

"They are treating you alright, though?" He asked.

"Malfoy just interrogated me for murdering his wife." Hermione said. "If you call that alright treatment, then I guess yes."

"What happened?" He said.

"I don't know." She said. "According to Nearly Headless Nick, Astoria's body was vacant by the time I showed or else I wouldn't have been able to enter it. The elf said she hit her head in the bathroom, but I don't know. I was busy being crushed by a chimney."

"Someone must have done this." He said, his auror mind working away.

"I don't know." She said and guessed the veritas serum had worn off. She certainly wasn't going to layout the theory that Malfoy was madly in love with her and called her spirit to him, because it was utterly ridiculous.

"I have to go." He said. "Let me know if you find out anything. We will solve this Mione."

She wasn't sure there was much to solve or do about it when solved. But she was glad she had Harry on her side again. He seemed to believe her. At least she had her friend back. He still deserved a few more beatings with hard and awkward objects though.

Chapter 16

Chapter 16

Hermione was pacing in her room, correction, Astoria's room. She certainly hadn't anticipated that she would be back at Malfoy Manor when she woke up this morning. She was exhausted, but she couldn't stop pacing.

Both Draco and Harry seemed to accept that she was Hermione now. She wasn't entirely sure it was a good thing. It was nice to have Harry back, but Draco might be another issue, particularly as she was married to him. She wondered what he was going to do now that he knew.

But no one came and dragged her out of the house, so eventually she went to bed. She went down to breakfast the next day at the normal hour and was greeted by the three Malfoys.

"Astoria, dear." Narcissa said, her words being more friendly than the manner of fact tone. "I hope you slept well. It must be nice for you to be back in civilisation after your little adventure."

This wasn't the greeting Hermione had expected as she was thinking something along the big imposter exposure spiel. But there was nothing indicating that they even knew, which meant that Draco hadn't told them.

Reasons for why he hadn't told them raced through her brain.

"Never better." She replied. Actually lied, "Yes it is good to be back in... civilisation."

Worry about what would happen had ensured that she had barely slept at all, but she certainly didn't want to encourage a discussion on the matter.

Draco seemed to arch an eyebrow at her lie, but he just returned his attention to the Daily Prophet. The quiet in the room was uncomfortable as Hermione's every move made noise that seemed to be amplified. It kept up throughout breakfast and Hermione tried as hard as she could to not make any noise, but every touch of her cutlery to her plate seemed to make a loud screeching noise.

When she was finished she excused herself and left.

She felt a tug on her arm as she moved up the stairs, with Draco detaining her.

"Where are your rings?"

"What rings?" She asked with confusion.

"You wedding band."

"Oh." Hermione said, she had forgotten about it as it had been so long. She had intended on putting them in the vault they had provided, but never got around to it. "Its in a box in my room somewhere. Do you want it?"

"You have to wear it." He said.

"I..." She started. She didn't want to wear it, but she couldn't quite articulate a reason without sounding stupid. She pretty much knew what his arguments would be, keeping up appearances or something the like. "Fine."

"Both of them."

"Fine." She said and pulled her arm out of his grip. "I want you to put the wards back the way they were."

"Why? Going somewhere?"

"I might." She said. "Is that a problem? Am I a prisoner?"

He didn't answer.

"I have a job, you know." Hermione said.

"Not anymore."

"You can't decide that."

"My wife does not work." He said.

"I'm not your wife." She said.

"There is this little oath that says you are." He said and took her wrist which made the magic of the marriage oath sizzle around her wrist.

"Look," Hermione started. "Let's not get into it again. We will find some way to get this sorted, until then let's not talk about."

"Until then, you will have to act like a wife does, Granger." He said. "Like my wife."

"And what is that supposed to mean?" She challenged.

"It means you look good, you do your duty, uphold the family name and you don't work like a common fishmonger." He said.

"I can't spend my days doing my hair and waiting for your boring parties." Hermione said.

"You will." He said.

"Like hell." She said.

"You better be ready for the Flints' party tonight."

"I'm not going." Hermione said. "I would rather do nothing then spend another evening with your insipid friends. I haven't met a more boring bunch of people in my life. I'd rather slit my wrists then spend another night with your horrid crowd."

"Well at the moment, most of them suspect that you have." He said. "Including Pansy."

Hermione knew he was appealing to her sense of being wronged and damn it, it worked. She didn't want Pansy to feel like she had chased her away. Hermione knew it was childish, but she could just imagine Pansy's gloating face when Draco started turning up alone.

“One party.” She said.

Draco raised his eyebrow.

“One party.” She repeated.

“I doubt it.” He said and turned to walk away. “Wear the rings.”

“I am going to work.” She called after him.

“I will put you in the dungeon.”

“You wouldn’t dare.” She yelled after him. He probably would.

Hermione let out a scream of frustration. He had made her agree to a party. How the hell did that happened, she had just let him manipulate her. Bastard.

She didn’t see him for the rest of the day. But he was waiting down in the foyer with the other Malfoy’s that evening. Hermione, despite her logical side and against her better judgement, had made a bit of an effort that evening. She wanted to make sure she didn’t look stressed or distraught in front of Pansy. Hermione wasn’t sure whether she was doing for herself or for Astoria, or just to goad Pansy.

Hermione would bet that the dress she was wearing was probably Astoria’s favourite.

“You look like a...slapper.” Draco said.

“They are your wife’s clothes, not mine.” She said. “I wouldn’t be caught dead in this. Just say the word and I will go upstairs and put my jeans on. This minute, really, please.”

“Shut up.” He said and took her arm to apparate them.

“Why do you even come to these things?” Hermione asked when they got there. “You don’t even enjoy them.”

“I do.” He defended.

“Really?” She said with a look of complete incredulity. “Is this you enjoying yourself? Do you not understand the concept?”

“These are my friends.” He said with annoyance.

“Your friends suck.” She said. “They are either trying to sleep with your wife or trying to break up your marriage. I dread to think what else you all do to each other. Really, who needs enemies with friends like yours.”

“That is just the way it is, you have to know the game if you are going to exist in this world.”

“No thanks.” Hermione said. “As far as I’m concerned, friends back each other up.”

“Is that what Potter did when he completely sold you out?” Draco said as they walked across the room smiling sweetly.

“That’s different.” She said.

“Completely.” He said. “At least we don’t stand by and take it when someone stabs you in the back.”

“For your information, Harry was obliged to say what he knew.”

“For your information, nothing would ‘oblige’ me to sell out my friends.”

“That because you don’t have any friends.” She said. “You Slytherins would sell you own mothers if you thought it would get you ahead.”

That seemed to kill the conversation. It was an unfair statement and she knew it. He had pretty much done what he did with Dumbledore to protect his family. It was still wrong on every level and completely cowardly, but she wasn’t sure whether she would really have been able to do anything different if she’d been in his situation.

He broke into conversation with someone and Hermione just had to stand there with his hand on her back. Christ, last time this had happened, she was planning on seducing him. What in the world had she been thinking?

The talking went on for ages and it was boring. Hermione had to stifle a yawn at one point. There was something to be said for Slytherins, their capacity for boredom was immense. Maybe that is why they were constantly such total shits, just to relieve the boredom.

Intermittently, Draco would cart her off to talk to another set of random Slytherin people.

“I hate everything about you people.” Hermione finally said.

“Funny, you seemed fairly accommodating before.” He said, which made Hermione blush. She had been, but there was a reason. She was just about to argue with him when he started another conversation with some Gringott’s officer.

“You know why.” She said when they finally moved away.

“Why what?” He said.

“I was... accommodating.” She said under her breath.

“You were trying to get in my pants.” He said with a smirk.

“I wanted a baby.” She snapped. “It was my only chance.”

“So you practically attacked some poor, unsuspecting bloke.” He said. “Someone completely innocent of your scheming designs. How every Slytherin of you.”

“Was not!”

“Really, shall we go through in detail what you did.” He said.

“No.” She admitted defeat. “I was under intense pressure. I had just died and woken up in another body. It that doesn’t constitute trying times, I don’t know what does. It would excuse complete mental instability.”

“And the only thing you wanted was to fuck me.” He said. “I’m touched.”

Hermione geared up for an argument.

“Pansy.” Draco said with sickly sweetness.

“Draco!” Pansy said with equal sweetness. “And Astoria.” She finished with less sweetness.

Pansy recovered quickly and went to air kiss Hermione. “How have you been, darling? I hope nothing been too trying.”

“Astoria has been in Italy.” Draco said. “Needed a bit of sun and sea.”

“I hope you aren’t unwell, you look awfully pale.” Pansy said. She obviously wasn’t convinced.

“You have to watch the skin.” Hermione said. “Can’t have sun burn, causes wrinkles.”

“Isn’t she a little pixie?” Draco said and pulled her close. “No, more like a Nymph really.”

Hermione narrowed her eyes.

“That little scowly face.” He said and circled a finger around her face, pulling her close. “I missed her so much. Couldn’t bare to be apart, could we, my love.”

Hermione was itching to say something strongly to the contrary, but Pansy was watching. And kept watching as Draco pulled her closer. Too close. Close enough to kiss and Hermione hadn’t realised his intention until they were.

Unanticipated sensation flooded her as his warm, soft lips made contact with hers. His hand on the back of her neck was pulling her closer into the kiss and it deepened. Hermione unwittingly just allowed it to deepen and she could feel his tongue invade her mouth. Not too much, just right, just perfect.

Hermione lost all comprehension of where she was. The only thing she could remember was their time together up against the wall in the hall, which was some time ago, but at this particular point, time didn’t exist. She wanted his closer. She remembered the feel of him, against her, in her.

Her blood sounded like a hurricane in her ears and it took her some time to distinguish that he was humming. She only really understood that when he was pulling away, about the time when the only concrete thought in her head was to pursue those retreating lips.

As her senses returned, she was mortally embarrassed that he had completely undone her like that, with a kiss. Hermione looked around for Pansy, but she was gone.

“She’s gone.” Hermione said.

“So it seems.” He said. “Think she got the message?”

Who the fuck cares, Hermione thought, I got a message. She wasn’t sure what it was, but it was something.

Chapter 17

Chapter 17

"I would like you to take Astoria to Diagon Alley today." Narcissa demanded of Draco the next day at breakfast after Hermione joined the son and mother.

Narcissa raised an eyebrow at both disgusted expressions. "You two need to learn to be a unit. That is how a marriage works, every marriage has trouble in the beginning, you both just have to learn to deal with your differences. Your father and I had our trouble in the beginning as well."

Like what, his Deatheater buddies were dragging mud through the house, Hermione thought bitterly.

"I have to go to work, mother." Draco said icily.

"You can take some time off, Draco." Narcissa said haughtily. "Your marriage is important. Possibly the most important thing in your life."

Draco snorted, but settled down when Narcissa gave him a scorching look. "Now, I expect you two to leave the house soon, I have people coming." With that she left.

"Why haven't you told her?" Hermione asked.

"Told her what?"

"About the situation?"

"What situation?"

"Don't play thick with me, Draco." Hermione said. "Instead of reconciling 'our marriage', I would rather spend time of figuring out how to get out of this mess."

"I'm not really sure getting out of it would be on mother's agenda. She likely wouldn't care if you thought you were Grinwelda the Fair." Draco said. "It won't achieve anything if we told her. She would just think you are one lucky little mudblood."

"Oh charming." Hermione said with narrowed eyes. "I'm pretty sure it would motivate her to help find a way out of this."

"As far as my mother is concerned the only way out of this marriage is death."

"And Astoria achieved that." Hermione said. She didn't like where this conversation was going. She was expecting something a little more productive.

"Even if I convinced my mother 100% that you were the Mudblood extraordinaire, my mother would not resolve this marriage between these two bloodlines." Draco said. "My grandparents planned this marriage. It was in place before I was born."

"That's barbaric." Hermione said with shock. "Children aren't cattle."

“No, children are there to serve the family.” Draco said. “That is our, my obligation.”

“That is insane.” Hermione said, serious this time.

“That is the way it is, welcome to the family.”

“And your children will have to be indentured into marriage as well, to breed like some farm animal?”

“Yes.”

“How could you do that to your children?”

“It is how things are done. How it has been for centuries, it has served us so far.”

“Really, how exactly did your marriage to Astoria serve you?”

“Her bloodline will strengthen us.” Draco said. “And that makes up for the fact that she was a vacant conniving whore.”

“There is something really off with you people. Your priorities are completely screwed up.”

“Oh, but darling, we’re your people now.” Draco said. “And you are king, or rather queen of this hill now. And as a dutiful wife of high wizarding society, you do not get let off your obligation to produce an heir. Not for anything.”

“You can’t be serious.” Hermione said with a jaw drop.

“What’s the matter?” He asked. “You seemed pretty keen on it before.”

“That was before.”

“Before I was aware of your machinations.”

“There are no machinations I am responsible for here.” Hermione said. “And don’t you dare try to foist this all off on me.”

“Really, for all I know, you did this.” He said with arrogant certainty. “I don’t know how, but you did. Aware or not, duty still stands. You do realise that getting you out of this means that there is no body for you to go back to, it means game over. Well I will need my heir before that.”

“But i you could have your heir with someone of your kind. Your second wife.”

“And wait around for you to effectively commit suicide. Hmm, I don’t know.” He said. “You might chicken out, or worse, send me to Azkaban for your murder. Either way, I think I will need my heir first. With an heir in place, I could probably pick my wife from a larger pool of candidates. So, next time you’re ovulating, *wife*, you will have to lay back and think of the joys of serving your duty.”

“This wasn’t a duty I signed up for.” Hermione yelled.

“Doesn’t matter.”

“You’re a pig.”

“Yes, but I am your pig.” He said with a fake smile.

“I am not going to Diagon Alley with you.” Hermione categorically stated, because she was too shocked to think of anything else to say.

“Fine.” Draco said and stormed out of the room.

Hermione left through the door to the garden and stomped around for a good half hour. She called him every name under the sun.

As she calmed down, she grudgingly admitted that he had been right about the fact that sorting this mess out would mean that she left Astoria’s body and that would mean she didn’t have another body to go to. Her soul would be released to follow its natural course, which was to go wherever souls go. Unless she chose to haunt Draco, which had a certain appeal just at the moment.

And now he insisted on a child, which was nothing but confusing, because it was her one and only desire, but having it with him, to provide him with an heir was just wrong. The thoughts of a child softened her as it always did. It still was the only thing she wanted in life. But these circumstances were probably as far from ideal as they could get.

If she had a child, she could not leave it behind to fend for itself in this heartless society. No, leaving a motherless child in this world was unconscionable. Who knows what kind of woman Draco would subsequently marry. Probably some evil, social climbing harpy with fake tits, fake hair, fake heart.

Maybe she could find out a little more from Draco what kind of woman he would choose to marry if he had an heir in place, just in case.

Hermione felt like her brain was going to quake open in confusion. She should have known better than to expect that Draco would actually work with her, no he served his goals exclusively. How could she have been stupid enough to expect anything different.

She tried to account for her options, but there were precious few. She couldn’t leave, the wards wouldn’t let her and she would only be allowed to leave with a member of the family. She could convince Draco that having a child right now was not a good idea, but she wasn’t sure he would see it his way. After all, he would gain freedom if he had a child with her. Although she could perhaps convince him that he was stuck with her if he did.

It was all she had, really. Unless she went upstairs and slit her wrists right now, which wasn’t really all that appealing. Then there was the small niggling hope of a baby. A bouncing, gurgling little bundle of life. A tiny person to pour into all the pent up love she had.

Leaving this world now would be such a waste. It was like she left no mark on it at all. Only leaving behind love for some friends who were getting on with their lives without her, even before she died. She wanted to leave this world loving something completely and unconditionally.

And there was only one way to achieve that.

Hermione tried to refuse the little party that was scheduled that evening, but Draco came to her room and told her she had to.

“Change.” He ordered.

"I don't want to go."

"And yet, that still doesn't matter." He said. "Change or I will Imperio you."

Hermione expected that he was probably serious.

"Fine." She said with exasperation. "Turn around."

"No."

"Turn around, I would like some privacy."

"It's not like you have anything I haven't seen before."

"Do you want me to come or not?"

He grudgingly turned around while Hermione slipped on one of Astoria's dresses. "I hate these dresses."

"Get some new ones." He said.

"I don't want dresses at all. I don't want these stupid parties." She said.

"Then get pregnant."

"You're a pig."

"I think we already covered this topic. Really Granger, for being a smart girl, you're a slow learner."

"I hate you."

"Again, not relevant."

Hermione spent the evening at his side, with his hand on the small of her back.

"Are you going to spend your life at these endless, brainless parties?" Hermione asked him quietly.

"Probably." He said. "They are not completely brainless, you just have to learn to read the politics. That's always been the problem with Gryffindors, too literal to read the intricate clues of wizard world politics."

Hermione snorted.

"There are important decisions made in this room, influenced, blocked and subverted. The pulse of this society. Huge amounts of money involved with the decision made right here, as well as policies. You think that decisions are made at the Ministry, but you couldn't be more wrong."

Hermione haruphed again, but was slightly intrigued by what Draco had said. She had been completely unaware that anything was going on here other than people showing off their jewellery and talking about their new house extensions.

She started to pay more attention to his dealings with people. Started to notice things.

"Did Astoria know?"

“Know what?” He asked.

“About what you were playing here?”

“Astoria cared very little beyond the state of her nails.”

“Pansy plays politics, doesn’t she?”

“Yes, but she is not very subtle at it. And she is too distracted with school type politics. Who is popular and who is not.” He said. “It’s not where the real game is, but it’s what Pansy likes to spend her time doing.”

“Have you slept with Pansy?” Hermione wasn’t sure where that came from, but wondered as Pansy had played so hard for him.

“Yes.”

“Recently?”

“Not for a while, why do you ask?”

“Does she use sex?” Hermione asked. “To get what she wants.”

“Undoubtedly.”

“What about Astoria?” Hermione wondered. Wondered what she had been doing with Nott.

“No she was too stupid and too well established.” Draco said. “Pansy is playing for her next position, her husband is ailing and will probably cark it.”

“Do you think Pansy is after you?” Hermione said, a tiny bit fascinated by their underhandedness. It would explain a bit of what had been going on.

Draco smiled. She wasn’t sure she had seen him smile before and she kind of liked it. “You are definitely smarter than you look.” He said.

It was kind of a compliment. Although it probably wasn’t hard to be smarter than Astoria.

Chapter 18

Chapter 18

Draco walked into Hermione's room the next day after breakfast.

"Don't you knock?" Hermione demanded.

"No, its my house."

"But this is my room."

"We are going to Diagon Alley." He said with an annoyed sigh, "Mother insists."

"Why for heaven's sake?"

"You said you wanted some new clothes, now is your chance."

"I can buy clothes anytime." Hermione said.

"You will never buy clothes on your own." He said. "I recall well the train wreck you called a wardrobe."

"Just because I don't dressing like a harlot."

"There is a vast world between harlot and asexual ministry stalwart."

"I do not dress like a ministry stalwart."

"And those muggle clothes you wore, they didn't even fit, were you actually trying to make yourself unattractive?"

"They are comfortable and practical, I refuse to suffer so men will have something to ogle at."

"And that is blatantly obvious, but you're a Malfoy now, suffering is mandatory."

"I don't want to go." Hermione said.

"It would be nice to think that was relevant, wouldn't it." He said. "You have two minutes to get ready, or you will go as you are."

Hermione crossed her arms and gave him a death look.

"Actually on second thought, I don't think that would have any effect at all, it would on Astoria, but you would probably be happy to go out in public in your PJs. Get dressed in something more appropriate or I will dress you." He pulled out his wand.

"You wouldn't dare."

"Try me. And don't bother trying to hex me, you can't, part of the marriage contract."

Hermione screamed in frustration. Then threw down the book she was wearing and stomped towards the wardrobe. She put on one of Astoria's more slutty dresses.

"That is an evening dress."

"Really, how can you tell?"

He walked over, and looked through the wardrobe.

"Here, this one." He said.

"I don't see the difference."

"You wouldn't."

Draco waited outside her room until she was ready, before walking her down the stairs to the foyer.

"Why are we going again?" Hermione asked.

"Mother thinks we need to spend time together."

"Your mother is a sadist."

Draco laughed as he took her wrist to apparate.

The weather was pretty brisk that morning, there were some shoppers around even at this early time in the morning.

Draco walked towards Madam Maulkin.

"The sooner we get this done, the sooner we can get out of here." Draco said.

Hermione tried on a procession of dresses, she and Draco had different tastes, and her opinion didn't seem to matter.

"Did you do this to Astoria too?" She asked.

"Astoria was a master shopper, her tastes ran to one direction, but she was in keeping with the image she had established for herself. Have you even brushed your hair today? I thought your hair was just a mess by nature, but I am starting to wonder if you nurtured that mess all this time."

"I brush." Hermione defended herself.

"You're actually starting to look more like you." He said more quietly.

"This looks nothing like me." Hermione said.

"You constantly have that sour puss face." He said.

"Sour puss? What are you, five?"

"Speaking of children." He said. "Your time is coming up."

Hermione knew he was talking about her ovulation. She had spent the whole morning thinking about it. Thinking about what he'd said before about an heir. It is what he wanted, and it is what she wanted, but it was just wrong. Although she had not thought it so back before, she had thought it was the best possible plan before. Before he knew it was her. Now it was just weird.

But she couldn't hide that it was still the thing she wanted more than anything. The sole true purpose of her life at this point. She guessed she just needed to get over the weirdness of it.

She looked down at Draco through the mirror as he sat on the sofa behind her. So confident. Did it not bother him at all? He wasn't jeering or anything, just accepting of the situation. Was he just fine with being used for breeding? It was what his marriage had been about from the very start, but why wasn't he straining against it?

"You know, as a mother, I would hardly promote pureblood ideals." Hermione said.

"Well it would be three against one, how much damage can you do?"

Hermione raised an eyebrow at the challenge.

"My children will be able to move through the muggle world." She said.

"I only need one." He said.

"And if its a girl?"

"Then two."

"Girls are less than?"

"Girls are a joy, but they are not heirs to the family name." He said.

"That is so old fashioned."

"Tradition is at the heart of this society."

"Girls are just as good as boys." Hermione said.

"You've been trying your best to prove that, haven't you?" He said.

"Nothing about your ideals hold." She said, trying on another dress. As she had lost count of the number of changes, she had also gotten over trying them on in front of Draco because he made it clear he wasn't leaving.

"That is immaterial."

"How can you say that's immaterial?" She said. "It disproves your whole pureblood theory."

"Tradition has validity on its own."

"But its wrong."

"Its respect to the past, to our history. Its not something you can chuck out because there are exceptions to the rule."

"Really, what about when the exceptions start outweighing the rules." Hermione said.

"That's hardly the situation."

"Not from where I'm sitting." She said.

"You are hardly typical."

“Are you saying I’m an exception to the rule?”

Draco picked some lint off the side of the sofa he was sitting on.

“You know you are.” He said quietly. “You’re... You are different.”

“No I’m not.”

“You don’t see it, but you are.”

“I am just like everyone else.” Hermione said with an air of indignity. “Ok, maybe, I’m not quite as vacant as Astoria, or caught up in running stupid little campaigns like Pansy. Obviously there are more important things you can focus your time on. Things other than ridiculous shopping. I would never, ever wear this. This looks like a tea doily with ambition.”

“You’re relentlessly idealistic.”

“What is wrong with that? What is wrong with wanting the world to be a better place.”

“Because you’re wasting your time.”

“So don’t bother trying?”

“You’ll wreck yourself trying. Nothing is going to change. It never will. If you can find some kind of happiness in this world be grateful for it. Its rare.”

“I can’t believe that.”

“Maybe that is why you’re different.” He said more to himself. “Enough of this. We have enough.”

“What do you mean, I haven’t found anything I like yet.” She said, but it was obvious that he was not prepared to keep looking.

Hermione’s new wardrobe got delivered the next day. None of it was stuff she would choose. They were marginally better than the existing wardrobe. A little less tight, a little less revealing. Still no-where near right on the comfy scale.

The next day, she felt the typical tightness of her mid cycle point. She felt a bit panicked, she didn’t know what to do. Telling him seemed wrong and impossibly embarrassing. It was like asking for sex, which at this point was just...

Which is funny because she went all out to seduce him before, but now that he knows she was in here, she just couldn’t. For some reason, it seemed alright when she was deceiving him, but now the idea of Hermione Granger and Draco Malfoy having sex was just unnatural.

And she couldn’t quite pinpoint why, other than the fact that he was Draco Malfoy. He had some good qualities, he was smart, he was attractive. But he was also a pureblood git who had unendingly made the distinction clear throughout their time at Hogwarts.

Her hands felt sweaty and she felt like she couldn’t catch her breath properly. Some of that was a consequence of her hormonal state, but she was feeling extremely uneasy. Telling him seemed a concept that just floated under the surface, but never quite made it up. So she didn’t.

She was still debating with herself about it when she retired for the evening. After all, if she was going to have the baby she wanted, she would have to bit the bullet eventually.

Her contemplation was interrupted by a brief knock before he entered her room and closed the room.

“What are you doing here?” She asked.

“Its time.”

“How... how do you know?”

“Your ring informs of the optimal time.”

“Oh.” Hermione said and looked down at the opal ring on her middle finger.

“It is required for thing to progress.” He said from across the room.

Hermione’s throat had gone completely dry. Biting the bullet was necessary, she reminded herself and she gave a quick nod.

He turned around and started to take his jacket off. Hermione stood frozen in her flannel PJs. After staring for what seemed like ages, she snuck under her sheets. This felt completely surreal. Maybe she shouldn’t be in these extraordinarily unattractive PJs, she recognised and started to undress under the sheets.

She was trying really hard not to gawk at him as he was increasingly undressing. She was too embarrassed to look. And she felt that embarrassment keenly as she felt his weight on the mattress.

There is always IVF, she said to herself, but chided herself for being ridiculous, she had already had sex with him three times. One of them counting as the best sex she’d ever had.

“I will be as quick as I can.” He said and she nodded. “Could you just shift a bit.”

Somehow she managed to elbow him in the rib as they were awkwardly navigating around. After grazing knees and an unintentional hair pulling incident, they managed to get in the right position.

“Ready?” He asked and again she nodded awkwardly.

He entered her really slowly. He had obviously brought some lubrication, because her body was not helping at all.

“Did I hurt you?”

“No, I’m fine.” She said, completely aware of how close he was.

“Nice tits by the way.”

“Can’t claim any credit, I’m afraid.” She said. “Although I did point them out to Harry.”

“Let’s not mention other people, especially him, it really isn’t helping.”

“Sorry.” She said. “Go ahead.”

He withdrew and pushed in, then seemed to stop to see if she’d complain. He continued when she didn’t. Hermione tried to relax, the sensation seemed to skirt around her brain, but was refused entry due to the awkwardness of the whole thing.

He picked up pace a bit and Hermione focused her thoughts on him. His skin really was beautiful, pale and dewy. He did smell lovely. And the weight of him on her was kind of delicious. The more she focused her mind of him, the more the sensations seemed to flood her. A moan seeped into her mind and lit a little fire.

His breathing was getting heavy and he was clasping her thigh. He was getting close. Nowhere near close for her, but she didn't mind. She was just happy there was something there.

He tensed as he came and he stifled some groans before collapsing on her. He was breathing heavily in her ear and she felt a kiss on her neck in the middle of it.

The next minute she felt cold air as he pulled away from her. He was still recovering his breath as he walked over to his clothes and started to dress.

"So you recommend that we do this every day?" He said as he was tucking his shirt into his pants.

Hermione cleared her breath. "It is recommended for optimal chance of conception." She stated matter of factly.

"You just want to get in my pants." He teased.

"A doctor recommended it." She said clearly so there was no confusion.

"Sure." He said with a sly smile. "See you tomorrow."

Chapter 19

Chapter 19

Hermione was trying really hard not to be embarrassed the next day. What they had done was a perfectly natural process. Something they had done before, in fact. He just didn't have to look so smug about it.

It's not like he'd achieved anything. This was strictly business. She wished he'd stop looking at her like he had categorically won an argument. Because she was only doing this because she wanted a baby.

Although saying that he was a lot more like himself than he had been when she first got here, when there was nothing but seriousness. Which was a lot more annoying to her because sleeping with the serious and very distant Draco was easier than sleeping with the one who goaded her to the point of tears on numerous occasions at school.

"Perhaps you two should go away somewhere for a while." Narcissa said while sipping her morning coffee.

Hermione struggled to suppress her expression of horror.

"I don't think that will be necessary." Draco said to her complete relief. "I think best to leave well enough alone."

Narcissa beamed a little smile which made Hermione cringe.

Let's just inform your parents that we are doing the nasty, she thought to herself. She took a second to think how ridiculous this moment was. Her sitting there, pretty much telling Lucius and Narcissa Malfoy that she was getting on adequately at milking their prodigal pureblood son of his precious pureblood seed. At what point did she move from grown ups being horrified to think she was having sex to a cheering squad.

Her parents hadn't gotten to that stage by the time of their accident. And Molly had stopped discussing it once it became apparent that Hermione was having difficulty. Once that was apparent, they had all the time in the world and there was absolutely no rush. That was Molly's way of trying to be supportive. Hermione never found lying comforting.

But secretly it also angered her that the Malfoys were pushing their son on Astoria who had been so awful. As far as they knew, she still was Astoria and they were pushing her on Draco for the sake of an heir. No consideration to the fact that the relationship between their son and his wife was far from ideal in terms of raising a child.

She hated how the well being of the family came before the well being of the family's individuals. He might have grown up with this, but she certainly hadn't. How ironic that out of the two of them, she was the one promoting selfishness.

Draco came to her room that night. Hermione still went pretty red, but she wasn't stuck like a deer in headlights. She knew he was coming. She chose a nicer set of PJs tonight. She

wouldn't go as far as to get into the lingerie drawer, that would just send the wrong message.

The tight little knot of nervousness in her stomach flipped as he started to undress. She wiggled down in the sheets and tried not to look. Not that he would notice because he was facing away from her. And she just couldn't help it as he rolled the shirt off his shoulders revealing the pale toned back.

She was studying him so intently, she hadn't noticed that he'd turned around.

"You'll get a closer look in a second." He said.

Hermione felt embarrassment burn again as she looked away trying to find somewhere else to place her gaze.

"Perhaps I will allow you to explore a bit." He said with a teasing voice. "Would you like that, Granger?"

"That won't be necessary." She said. "This is strictly business."

"If you say so." He said and moved to the bed. "Although the unabated lust in your eyes say different."

"There is no unabated lust in my eyes." She said feeling a bit cornered. She pulled the sheets a little tighter around herself. There had been no lust in her eyes, maybe a slight curiosity. "There is no lust. This is necessary. To achieve our goals, which happen to be the same on this one instance. Can we just get on with it."

"Remove the sheet."

"What? No."

"I'm not a machine." He said. "A bit of visual stimulation helps. I don't necessarily rise on command."

"You did have any problems last night." Hermione said, feeling he was taking advantage of the situation.

"Well that was last night and this is tonight." He said and he lifted the sheet away. "Its not like I haven't seen it before."

"You're enjoying this way too much."

"This might come as a surprise to you Granger, but you are supposed to enjoy it."

Hermione huffed.

"You can lay back and think of the greater good if you like." He said and was now kneeling across her legs. He stroked the skin of her thighs slightly and Hermione pressed her knees together out of reflex and nervousness. "You know, if I hadn't seen it with my own eyes, I would say you were incapable of enjoying it, but we both know better, don't we."

Hermione knew he was referring to that night in the foyer when she had seduced him.

"That was... That was just tension."

“Tension, is that right?” He said. “A bit of tension is good. In fact, I would go as far as to say that you are very tense this moment.” His fingers travelled up to her belly and her stomach muscles clenched under his touch.

“Just hurry please.” She said.

“And eager.”

“I just... Stop teasing me, this is hard enough.”

“You’re the one who insisted we do this every night.”

“So we’ll get pregnant, so we don’t have to do this forever.”

“Well that’s a new one, lets fuck a lot in order to fuck less.”

“Don’t be so crude. It makes perfect logical sense.”

His hand was now covering her breast and he pressed gently on the mound. Hermione felt exposed and wanted to cover herself with the blanket. Trying to ignore the heat.

“Won’t you allow yourself even a little pleasure?”

“Won’t you allow yourself a bit of independence?” She said.

“What is that supposed to mean.”

“You do everything your parents tell you. Cower to the supposed good of the family.” She said. “You married a person who was entirely unsuitable to being a grown up let alone a wife, then perform on command when they decide its time for you to procreate.”

He stopped what he was doing and watched her for a second. He grabbed her hips roughly and pulled her down to him. Somehow in all this, his pants had come down and he entered her roughly.

“Maybe you underestimate the situation, Granger.” He said. “Maybe I’m doing this for the sole reason of pissing you off. Because believe me, I don’t fuck anyone I don’t want to.”

He moved in and out of her quickly. He kept up the brisk pace until his breathing became ragged. He slammed into her until he came, then collapsed.

“Seriously Granger, you could make a sex starved hermit lose interest in sex. Do you have to be arseholes and elbows about everything?”

“I am not arseholes and elbows about things.”

“Are you seriously that unaware that you can’t tell that you are unable to go with the flow on anything?” He said. “I will never understand how Potter and the Weasel managed to hang out with you for so long without strangling you.”

He climbed out of bed and did up his pants. Hermione pulled the sheet over herself. Maybe, she conceded, her timing had not been stellar to point out his kowtowing to his family.

“My wife might have been too big an idiot to realise she was a complete bitch, what’s your excuse?” He said before leaving.

Hermione closed her eyes. She knew that everything she had said was correct, but it might have been a little tactless.

He didn't come to her room the next night. Hermione had spent quite a bit of time that day thinking about the ending of the previous night. She hadn't said anything wrong, technically. It was all true and she was not one to hide from the truth. If he didn't like it, he could just deal with it. Perhaps, she admitted, it was not a coitus related conversation. Not one to endeavour as one is trying to get pregnant.

The fact that he didn't come that evening was worrying. She didn't want to go back to a once a month visit. It could take years to get pregnant. That was not a future she wanted to contemplate.

She went down periodically during the day to see if he was in his study, but he wasn't there until late in the afternoon.

"What do you want?" He said as he saw her at the door.

"Are you coming to my room tonight?"

He put the papers he was reading down. "I'm not sure I can bare it."

"I wasn't insulting you." She said, deciding it was just better to jump into it.

"Yes you were."

"Ok, fine, I was." She said. "I just don't like how someone's wellbeing is secondary. I don't accept it. Especially not from family, and I won't tolerate it for my child."

"Being a Malfoy comes with responsibilities." Draco said. "We have traditions that go back longer than living memory, sometimes recorded memory."

"Well, I don't put the stock in tradition that you do. If its not working for you, it needs to change."

"That is such a muggle attitude."

"Well, the muggles don't have it all wrong." Hermione said. "Sometimes you just have to evolve. Let go of traditions that no longer reflect the current situation. Some would go as far to call it a survival skill."

"Our traditions have kept us strong."

"Really, is there strength in a miserable marriage?"

Draco didn't argue, it was clear that he couldn't come up with a reasonable argument why his marriage was a great positive on a personal level.

"The bloodlines..."

"I don't care about bloodlines." Hermione interrupted in a heated way. "I won't sell out my children's happiness for some stupid notion of bloodlines."

"Its more than bloodlines, an alliance with the Greengrasses strengthened our hold on some industry relationships."

“That’s even worse, selling out your children’s wellbeing for money.”

Draco didn’t argue, so the silence prevailed.

“That is the situation you find yourself in.”

“That can’t be reasonable to you.” Hermione said.

“It is the world I have lived in since I was born.” Draco said. “I always knew what was expected of me, I’ve known I would marry one of the Greengrasses since I was a small child.”

“You can’t deny how unhappy you were with her.”

Draco didn’t answer again.

“You would have made a better choice.” Hermione said. “Obviously you wouldn’t have chosen someone like me.” This made him smile a bit.

“But you would have chosen some Slytherin girl, one that suited you.” Hermione continued. “With all that ingraining of family values, you could have been trusted to make decisions that benefited everyone.”

“I loath to admit it, but you are probably right.” He said. “Then again, if I really had a choice, I’m not entirely sure I would trust myself not to make the wrong decision.”

Now Hermione was confused.

“I don’t understand.” She said. “That is illogical.”

He was staring at his desk, playing with a letter opener. Hermione decided that there must just be some pureblood thought processes that were plain illogical. Would forever be beyond her.

“All I am saying is that this child should have the right to choose a mate that suits them. There is a way of balancing tradition and the needs of the present. With adequate guidance. There is something to be said for values if a family can trust its members to uphold them.”

“But that way, you have to concede to logical arguments.” He said. “Which doesn’t quite work when someone can argue any point logically.”

Hermione suspected that there was a complement in there, but she not going to get distracted from her goal.

“No arranged marriages.” She said, letting the whole discussion come to its head.

“Fine.” He conceded. “You would have argued with Voldemort until he was blue.”

“Yes, I would have argued him into submission.”

“If it were possible to annoy someone to death, I am sure you would have perfected the art by now.”

Chapter 20

Chapter 20

Draco came to her room that night. She guessed their talk had allowed them to reach a mutual understanding. She had her core concerns addressed and she had pretty much acknowledged that it might not be the appropriate time to voice her observations about his family dynamics.

Hermione watched him undress. Watched him take his shirt off, having a sip from his drink before undoing the belt buckle of his pants. Watched them sink down from his narrow waist. He really was beautiful.

She had always been disgusted by his beauty in school, the way girls tried so hard to get his attention. She had managed to talk herself into feeling that he was hideous, but the truth was that he had always been stunning.

He still had his boxers on when he walked towards the bed. Hermione wasn't nervous, she wasn't dreading it.

"I'll be as quick as I can." He said and crawled in next to her. Divesting himself completely in the process.

Everything went very smoothly, he slid between her thighs and slid inside her. There was none of the uncomfortableness of the previous times. Hermione felt him fill her, felt her body stretch to accommodate him, heard his moan as he sunk into her.

She didn't block out the intrusion, instead watched him as he raised up on his hands and pumped his hips into her. She watches as the muscles in his shoulders, chest and abdomen strained with the effort. Felt as the full feeling grew with each thrust. Her body was starting to anticipate each time his hips hit home fully inside her.

He was getting close, his face was taking on a pained expression and little groans were escaping his lips. He lay down on her completely and would his arms around her to get better hold of her as he reached his shattering finish.

Hermione couldn't help but to arch her body a bit for more sensation as he firmly ground to her as he reached his climax inside her. She could feel him coming inside her. Experiencing him coming inside her made her body flare to life. She wanted more, savouring each sensation as he recovered. But he was pulling out and she wanted more.

Her body vibrated with need as he got out of bed and started to dress. She ground her knees together, wanting to ask him to come back.

"There's a do at the Ministry tomorrow night. Black tie." He said.

"Oh." Hermione said. Happy for the distraction. Her lusting after him broke the strictly business terms of this arrangement. "I guess I will have to wear something shiny then."

“It starts at five because they intent to serve dinner. I would eat before hand, the Ministry is notoriously stingy.”

“Ok.” Hermione said trying to calm herself.

“Until tomorrow.” He said with a little mock salute.

Hermione sunk back into her pillows with a groan. She refused to let herself be one of those dim-witted females that threw themselves at him. If only she could convince her body of that.

Hermione couldn't concentrate the next day. She tried to spend some time in the library, but she was preoccupied with what happened last night. Instead she paced and ended up walking around the house. She was getting to know the house quite well, she had been in most room, other than the private rooms of the family. She probably could not image anything worse than walking in on Lucius Malfoy getting dressed.

But she found herself in front of a door she had never opened. It was Draco's bedroom. His inner sanctum. She turned to leave, but her curiosity got the better of her. She slowly opened to door and peaked inside. It was a room full of dark wood and green. A large room, similar in size to her own. Definitely masculine. There were no feminine touches. Not a trace of Astoria. It was understated luxury.

She saw the bed where he slept, wondered what he looked like when he slept. When she was younger, she'd wondered if he did such human things. The bed was made, the room was orderly, nothing out of place.

She could see some of his old quidditch gear on a bookshelf. A photo of the Slytherin class. A scattering of stuff around the place.

It felt wrong being there, but she was too fascinated to leave. She walked into the bathroom, a green marble room with silver trimmings. It had surprisingly few things in it. He certainly wasn't one for clutter. She picked up an unlabelled bottle and recognised his cologne when she opened the stopper. It was an echo of him, but not the whole. Not the full.

She couldn't quite identify what was missing, but it was flat. She looked around the room to see if she could find anything that would fill in the missing. There was little there to go on, she returned to the bedroom and had a look in the closet. She saw one of this outer robes, something that wouldn't be cleaned immediately.

She was right, it smelled like him, the full rich scent that the cologne only formed part of. It filled her lungs and her mind for a second.

I'm insane, she determined and put it back. She returned it so there would be no indication she was there, then quietly snuck out of the room.

Hermione dressed in one of the dresses that Draco had gotten for her the other day. It actually looked better than she thought at the time. It was more demure than the others, much more so than Astoria's dresses. A dusky pink that looked grown up but still feminine. It hinted at her curves, because there were a hint of curves now. Many of Astoria's dresses wouldn't fit anymore as they were tailored to Astoria's stick figure frame.

Hermione did the slightest of make-up, she was beyond allowing the elves to help her dress.

Draco was waiting downstairs at five. He watched her come down the stairs. He had dress robes on, perfectly fitted dress robes. And they looked good.

“Your Grangerness is just irrepressible.” He said.

“What is that supposed to mean?”

“You look like you, I can’t really see Astoria anymore. Its her face, her body, but you look like you somehow. Its amazing how the same body can be carried so differently.”

Hermione took the observation as just an observation. Although she wondered if she was doing something that was disappointing.

He held out his elbow and she took it.

The Ministry function was in full swing. It was a huge function to celebrate the retirement of one of the Ministry stalwarts. A well respected man who had been Minister around twenty years ago.

The dinner was on the light side, mostly finger food. Hermione was glad Draco had told her to eat beforehand. Draco was doing his thing, working the room. Hermione was trying to pay attention, but she kept on getting distracted by him. She felt the warmth of his body at her side. His dress robes were doing their part of accentuate the sleek lines of his hips and torso, reminding her of the persistent and embarrassing unsatisfaction she was left with last night.

She left him for a while as she saw Harry across the room. She wandered over towards where Harry was. He was sitting with Ginny and Ron, as well as Neville and Luna. Hermione felt her heart twist at the sight.

She stood some ways away and watched them. She couldn’t really approach them. It would be strange that Astoria Malfoy would approach them, particularly after the events just after this whole thing happened.

Harry seemed to notice that he was being watched and looked up. Hermione couldn’t help but breaking into a large smile as he saw her. He excused himself and walked towards her, they retreated behind one of the pillars so they wouldn’t raise as many eyebrows.

“How’ve you been?” Harry asked.

“Good.” She said. “Its so good to see you. I’ve missed you.”

“They treating you ok?”

“Fine.” She said. “How’s everything with you?”

“Ginny is pregnant again.” He beamed.

“Congratulations Harry.” Hermione said and gave him a hug.

“I haven’t been able to find anything useful that can help with your situation.” Harry said.

“Me neither.” Hermione said. “But its not the end of the world. I’m fine. I actually have time to do some of the research I’ve never had the time to do before. The Malfoy library is a

bit of a gem.”

“Luckily you ended up somewhere with an extensive library.”

“Could you imagine if I ended up as Mrs. Goyle. I would have killed myself.”

“What are you doing huddling with my wife, Potter?” Draco said from behind them.

“Just checking on her wellbeing.” Harry said and tensed slightly.

“She is fine, aren’t you darling?” He said smiling and put his arm around her possessively. “If anything you should check on me because she is riding me mercilessly every night.”

“You’re an evil little prick.” Hermione said, embarrassed.

“But I’m not a liar, am I?” He said with a cross between his smirk and smile. He gave her a squeeze and stepped away. “We should be leaving some. Don’t be long.”

“You’re sleeping with him?” Harry said.

“We kind of have this agreement.” She said. “We both want a baby and that is the only way to do it. Circumstances are such that we can only turn to each other for such a thing. So...”

“You’re sleeping with Malfoy!”

“You know how badly I’ve wanted a baby. And now I can. I know things aren’t perfect, but I’ve had to adjust.”

“But Malfoy.”

“It strictly business, Harry.” She voiced the term she had used as a mantra lately. “I have to go.” She said. She didn’t really, but she knew this could boil down to a rather unpleasant argument and she was not going to give up her baby because Harry objected to who she had to do it with. Nothing was going to stop her.

“You didn’t have to do that.” She said sharply when she found Draco.

“True, but I really, really wanted to.” Draco said as he led her to the apparition point.

“It was unnecessary.” She said.

“Well he would have figured it out when your belly starts to swell. Or were you flatly going to deny it until the end.”

Hermione harrumphed.

“And besides, did you see his expression. I have been waiting for years to see that expression on the Golden Boy.”

“That is so immature.” Hermione said as he apparated them away.

“The same could be said for hiding the fact that we are sleeping together.” He said. “Speaking of, I think its time to move onto the belly swelling part.”

Hermione wanted to sulk, but refused to give Harry he influence to make her embarrassed about it. But the thought of her belly swelling send shivers down her spine, shivers that

settled in her core. She refused to look at him as he nodded, instead kept her eyes on the buckle of his belt. Although that didn't make things much better, because she started to blush.

"For Merlin's sake, don't blush. How do you expect me to keep this stringently companionable if you start blushing. I'm not made of steel, you know. I am having a hard enough time controlling my instincts without you acting like a virgin. Now lets go."

Hermione followed him upstairs to her bedroom. He undressed in his usual fashion and Hermione unzipped her dress. She was struggling as her fingers seemed uncooperative, but she managed.

Her hands trembled as she slipped between the sheets. She was nervous, but it was a very different kind of nervous than before. Much more anticipatory nervous. The heat of his body was lovely when he joined her. He seemed to flow in between her thighs and into her. The sensation of him invading her body was inescapable, it flowed like electricity through her. And each thrust sent a fresh wave.

He stayed chest to chest tonight and Hermione existed under the weight of him. His groans vibrated through her like the strings on a harp. She had to bite her knuckle to stop herself from joining him. She was actively trying to suppress the growing sensation, which seemed to add a little to a full cup each time he bottomed out in her.

He became more jerky and prolonged as his release was claiming him. He ground into her and the release Hermione had been trying to suppress claimed her he succumbed. She arched into him to bring him deeper, trying desperately to control her breath, almost passing out from lack of oxygen. She hoped he'd been too caught up in his own to notice that he dragged her with him.

He pulled out and raised himself over her, staring down at her like something impossible had just happened. He sat down on the edge of the bed facing away from her. Hermione had no idea what he was thinking, she got the distinct impression that he'd noticed. She pulled the sheets closer to her.

"Did you just.." He started but stopped. "I have to go." He pulled on his pants and grabbed his robes in one hand. He looked at her for a second. He didn't look angry, he looked stunned.

Hermione was dying of embarrassment as he turned towards the door and left. She sank back into the bed and lifted her arm over her eyes in an attempt to block out the world.

Chapter 21

Chapter 21

Breakfast was painful for Hermione the next morning. There was no way she could rationalise away what happened if he confronted her. But luckily he didn't. He wasn't gloating or goading her about it.

Technically it wasn't a bad thing. Maybe they just had to be grown up about it. Sex was innately pleasurable after all and she had just felt it. Keenly. With Draco Malfoy. But there is something that sits very badly about losing control with your school nemesis. She guessed she couldn't roll her eyes and give him a scathing look now that he claimed all she wanted was to get in his pants. Pretty hard to deny it convincingly now.

And now he would assume that her insistence that they do it every night was a bit of a ruse so she could get more of him. Which wasn't exactly true, technically. Alright maybe that last few days but embarrassment cooled her ardour significantly. Well, the teasing hadn't started during breakfast. At least he was gentlemanly enough not to do it in front of his parents.

Towards the end of breakfast, she locked eyes with him, expecting some gloating, but it wasn't there. He was just looking back at her for what seemed like ages. And then he broke eye contact.

He broke eye contact first, Hermione repeated. He is displeased. Maybe even disgusted, she realised. Hermione wanted to cry. She excused herself and left the breakfast room. She ran back to her bedroom and locked herself away. She half expected him to confront her and she wasn't expecting a teasing confrontation, she was expecting more of an accusation, but it didn't come. He didn't come.

Hermione couldn't concentrate the rest of the day. She kept on thinking about what happened and what the implications could possibly be. He might kick her out again. She started planning for that eventuality. The elusive baby was out of reach again and she started to cry again.

It was just sex, it didn't mean anything, she told herself, it could have been anyone. But she wasn't sure it was entirely true because she couldn't imagine having sex with anyone else. She fell apart when he kissed her, admittedly it was always under duress on his part, but it still made her lose grip on reality when he did. And yesterday, she'd gone into his room and smelled his clothes like a pervert.

The worst part was that he would think she was in love with him and the evidence was kind of on his side. Finally she was the stupid little mudblood who was in love with him. The one who had to be borne until she produced an heir and then what? Discarded?

No, he hadn't given any indication that he planned that. He hadn't given any indication that he didn't. He had agreed no arranged marriages for the child, but that didn't mean anything. She didn't think he would be so cruel as to separate her from the child. But that didn't mean he wouldn't stash her and the child somewhere. Find some way to divorce her.

She had to come to terms with it. He would do as he pleased and she needed to be ok with any of his choices. What else did she want, to be here with him, live like man and wife? She needed to get a grip. She wasn't sure how things had gotten so out of control.

She had to go out with him tonight. There was a do on and she was needed to hang of his arm as he did his networking. Well, if he did divorce her, she didn't have to do that anymore, which was something.

She didn't see him until it was time to leave for the event. He watched her walk down the stairs, he didn't look hostile. He didn't look much of anything, guarded maybe. The serious, distant man she'd seen when she first woke up here.

They didn't say anything, but apparated them to their destination.

"Do you want a drink?" He asked and she nodded. He waved over a waiter and grabbed a glass of wine for her. "You can't drink much."

"I know." She said, acknowledging that she might be pregnant and unaware of it. In truth, she hadn't drunk even moderately in years in the faint hope that she might be.

The games began, but Hermione couldn't pay attention. She was too aware of him, trying to guess what was on his mind, but he was being charming which she knew was complete acting. He was very good at it.

They did the circuit around the room.

"Drakie darling." They heard as they moved and found Pansy. "I hope this party isn't boring you to tears. I know how tedious you find them. Astoria, you look... Actually Draco, I have someone you should meet. You should run along Astoria and chat to some of your old class mates, I hear your company has been missed. I will take good care of Draco."

I am sure you will, Hermione said to herself.

"She stays with me tonight." Draco said without humour.

"Oh, alright." Pansy said with a plastered on smile. "Completely understandable, she is less than trustworthy, isn't she?"

"Pansy." Draco warned.

"Oh come on Draco, we all know she is easily distracted." Pansy said, which was a nice euphemism. "And some of those distractions are here tonight."

Hermione guessed that Astoria was supposed to throw a hissy at this point and stomp off. Or maybe Draco, according to Pansy's plan, was supposed to blow up at her, send her away. But none of that happened, they just stood there. Confusion showed through in Pansy's eyes.

"I think maybe some finger food would be nice, Draco." Hermione said. "I had a very light supper this evening, could you wave down one of those canopies bearers for me."

"Certainly darling, next time the waiter comes by. I saw some caviar blinis before, I know you're a fan of those." It wasn't true, but she would eat caviar blinis until she turned green if she had to.

Pansy was staring at one of them then the other.

“You can’t be serious Draco.” Pansy said. “Has she got your balls in her purse?”

Draco raised an eyebrow at her.

“She’s fucking everyone under the sun and you’re fetching her blinis?” Pansy said with complete incredulity.

“He is such a darling.” Hermione said with the sweetest smile she could manage.

“Well Pansy, my wife might have erred in the past, and I am pretty sure I have you to thank for a fair chunk of it, but we have come to an understanding. She is a new woman now.” Draco said.

Hermione wanted to laugh.

“You can’t put aside the things she’s done.” Pansy said.

“You know, I find that I don’t regret anything that’s happened.” Draco said matter of factly.

“That’s a bit strong.” Hermione said to him. “A pretty broad statement.”

“I categorically don’t regret anything that’s happened.” He said facing her now. Her heart started beating strongly.

“You need to get rid of her.” Pansy said through gritted teeth. “Look at her, she looks awful, she’s completely letting herself go. Look at what she’s wearing. Look at her hair. She’s an embarrassment.”

“I don’t know,” Draco said to Pansy, “just because she isn’t showcasing herself to all and sundry. I think its an enviable quality.”

“Even me.” Hermione said to him. “Being here.”

“No.” He said back to her.

“What is wrong with you?” Pansy said.

“What happened to me being too far beneath you? What about all those years when I was the scum of the earth.”

“Well, I think we have gotten over any concerns about you being beneath me. We’ve had some good practice lately.” He said. “And from what I gather, you have started to really like our... social standing. You certainly weren’t complaining last night.”

Hermione blushed.

“You’ve completely lost your mind, Draco.” Pansy said.

“Why are you still here, Pansy?” Hermione finally said to her with annoyance. Pansy huffed and stalked off.

“She might be right, are you sure you know what you’re saying?” Hermione asked. “You hate me.”

“I have come to appreciate some of your qualities.”

“Like what?”

“Loyalty.” He said. “You’re relentless optimism. The things you think are important. The way you believe the best of people. The way you just charge into situations, sometimes without any strategy for getting yourself out.”

“Sometimes you just don’t need to get out.” She said quietly.

Something seemed to sink behind his eyes and he pulled her close.

“Did you keep my picture?” She asked, he was so close to her. “From the Prophet?”

“Yes.” He said, she felt his breath on her lips.

“Why?” She asked and he didn’t answer.

“Did you wish for me?” She whispered.

He was quiet for a moment. “Yes.”

The hard pit of tension in her stomach seemed to explode and flood her. He leaned in that tiny bit further and kissed her. Electricity flowed through every cell in her body, fusing her to him. Hermione lost track of everything except the feel of him, the feel of his body, of his lips. Her body seemed to lose its structure and consistency. All she needed for the next eternity was to be melted into his body.

He broke the kiss and he looked undone. Looked like she felt. He grabbed her wrist and started walking towards the entrance way. He literally dragged her behind him. He grabbed her waist as apparated without a word as they got to the entrance way.

He didn’t break step as they arrived at home, he kept walking and she tried to keep up. They went up the stairs, but instead of turning left to her room, they turned right. He was taking her to his room.

He closed the door behind them, pushed her up against the wall and leaned into her.

“Now, where were we?”

“Here.” She said and leaned into reclaim his lips. It was a slow, deep kiss that reverberated throughout her. It went on forever, but eventually they were out of air.

“I think, Granger,” He said, “that you have a thing for me.”

“I could perhaps be accused of such.” She said and he beamed.

He brought his lips down to her neck and ran them lightly over her skin making her shudder.

“There are a few things I’ve been wanting to do to you.” He said. “I have been trying so hard to restrain myself.” He brought his hand up to her breast and massaged it lightly. Singeing heat flared in her core.

“But I think I need to here you say it.” He said in a rough voice.

“Say what?” She managed through breaths.

“Lets see.” He said and smiled. She could feel his smile at her collar bone.

“Oh, now comes the teasing.” She stated with amusement.

“I am perfectly happy to tease, you’ll see, but I need to hear you say it.”

“Say what?”

“Say — Fuck me Draco.”

“So eloquent.” She said with a laugh.

“Say it.” He said. “No, no, no, I’ve got a better one. Say — Fuck me, husband.”

He pulled back and looked her in the eye. The amusement retreated to a more serious note. Hermione searched his eyes for deception, but she didn’t find anything.

“Fuck me, husband.” She said.

His lips claimed her and he pressed her into the wall. The kiss was rougher, needier. Her legs came up and circled his waist.

“Too many clothes.” He said and started to tug them off. Hermione was pretty sure the zipper had just given away. But she was too distracted by his hands on her skin to worry about a ruined dress.

She tugged up his shirt and allowed her hands to explore his waist. His skin was so warm and smooth. She wanted to kiss it, taste it. Her fingers fumbled with the buttons of his shirt before he lost patience and ripped them out too.

Hermione sighed when she got him skin to skin. She felt herself being laid back on the bed and soaked in the feeling of his weight on her. His hands roamed her body and hers were busy clasping him to her.

His mouth roamed her chest, licking, tugging, teasing. But he returned to her lips for another deep kiss. Exploring her mouth.

“I can’t wait.” He said as he pulled back for air. He placed himself at her entrance and pushed inside. He kissed her again and Hermione moaned into the kiss.

Hermione couldn’t get enough, she needed his deeper. She grabbed his hips and guided him back as he pulled back. A few smooth strokes and Hermione was feeling her release overtaking her. She grabbed his hips harder to get him as deep inside her as possible. He kept kissing her as his release claimed him.

He lay on her with dead weight as he recovered his breath. Hermione struggled to breath with the weight, but she wouldn’t move him for the world.

“You know.” He said as he recovered enough to talk. “I think I can, as you suggest, do this every night. But I think I need to try again to be sure.”

Hermione laughed.

“Now, what to do? There are so many things to try.” He said and pulled her up to sitting.

Chapter 22

Chapter 22

Hermione was three days late. She was now in the position she had been in so many times before and there was no way of protecting herself at this point, sitting in the bathroom waiting for the little sticks to do their thing. She always got three stick, muggle ones, they were more reliable than the wizarding pregnancy detection methods. At times like these, when her heart was completely on the line, she preferred the unwavering finality of chemistry.

She had retreated back to her own bathroom, her little cave. She had been staying with Draco in his room for the last few weeks. It had been absolutely wonderful. She would hardly be able to wait for him to come home from wherever it was he went and they would spend the evenings together. Mostly in bed.

But now, she was going down this well trodden road and it usually ended with a couple days worth of crying. Although it could not, and she wasn't entirely sure what that entailed, she'd never been down that particular road.

She sat on the end of the bath and waited the eternity it took. Her leg would not stop shaking. Praying constantly. She tried to look out of the window, tried to find some kind of distraction. It looked very autumny outside. The wind had picked up a bit and it was overcast.

She had not told Draco anything about what she was doing today. This was a solitary activity. She had learnt that from experience.

Finally the timing on her wand chimed. It was time. She got up and walked toward the little sticks. She had them deliberately turned away so she couldn't see things developing. She turned the first around and saw two stripes. She had to blink because she might be hallucinating. She quickly turned the second one and it had two stripes too. Her heart was beating so loudly now she could hear anything else. She turned the last stick with had a plus on it, it was another kind of test, just in case.

Hermione sank down on the floor and covered her mouth with her hand. She was pregnant. She was finally on that road she had never travelled down. There was a baby growing inside of her. His baby. She started crying.

Draco was happy, not earth shatteringly delirious like Hermione. But Hermione was deliriously happy. Draco wanted to tell his parents but Hermione wanted them to wait at least another month so they can be sure, these things were precarious in the first weeks. She didn't want to bring anyone else into it, until it was a little further down the track.

She didn't quite know what this baby would be, how much of her, if any would be in the child. She didn't care. It could be thick as a plank and pure Slytherin for all she cared. It was a baby and it was hers, and she would love it completely. Draco wanted a boy, but she didn't care.

She did tell Harry though. Wrote him a note. She got a congratulations note back. She knew that Harry was still concerned and uncomfortable about her being with Draco. She hadn't told him that they were now actually together, beyond the strict baby making objective. She would have that conversation with him later. At the moment, she just didn't want the negativity, not when she was so happy.

Draco was no prince charming, he was still arrogant git in many respects, but he made her laugh and he made her knees go weak.

Things could not have been more perfect, a future stretched before her. Her belly would start to swell, then the baby that would grow into a child. She wondered about her friends and how her life would be. Harry might grow to grudgingly accept Draco. Ron never would.

She wasn't sure it was worth ever telling Ron. He would feel betrayed by her being with Draco, even though it was none of his business and it made her happy. There was just some things Ron could not look past and Draco was the very top of that list.

She still waited to do the shopping, which she had been putting off for years. It has been too dangerous emotionally to go near the baby stores. It felt strange that she could actually go there, had a real reason to. But she waited, she was scared that something would go wrong. Women had miscarriages all the time and it was kind of prevalent amongst the pureblood set.

She was going to do everything to help this baby on the way, she would exercise a little, eat the right things, get plenty of sleep and remove all stress.

She had taken to strolling around the gardens during the day. It was actually lovely on these autumn days. Not the typical walking weather, but still lovely when attempted.

"Astoria." Hermione heard behind her.

"Pansy." Hermione said as she turned around. Pansy was walking in high heels through the sodden earth wearing something that looked completely out of place. Especially compared to Hermione's sturdy boots and blanket.

"Astoria, darling." Pansy said as she came up to her. "You look awful. Have you completely lost any sense of decency? You're wearing a sofa throw-over."

"I am at home, Pansy." Hermione said. "I don't see the need to dress up in tailored suits. I wasn't expecting company." What do you want, Hermione wanted to demand.

"Sometimes I worry that I underestimate you." Pansy said, "But other times, it is plain obvious that you are out of your league."

"Pansy, I don't care to listen to your insults. I simply just don't care, so state your business and leave." Hermione said not even trying to keep the total exasperation out of her voice.

"Nott misses you so much." Pansy said. "He is quite beside himself. He is such a good match for you, and now you've gone and thrown it all away."

"I don't have time for this." Hermione said and brushed past Pansy. Pansy had ruined her walk and she was now going back inside.

"Petrificus Totalus." Hermione heard behind her before her body stiffened and she fell backwards, completely body bind. Hermione couldn't believe that she had just been attacked

by Pansy, she realised in hindsight that she should never have turned her back on Pansy, but she never expected that Pansy would attack her so blatantly. Socially perhaps, but not physically.

Pansy walked up and blocked out the piece of sky that Hermione could see.

"You've gone and ruined everything, Astoria." Pansy said. "I didn't want to hurt you, but you made me. Your total stupidity forced my hand."

Hermione couldn't move and couldn't talk.

"And then, you had the complete inconsideration of not dying." Pansy said with bitterness twisting her voice. "I didn't want to hurt you, really I didn't, but what could I do? You just don't get it. I am the one who belongs here, not you, its always been that way. And now my dear husband is dying. Perfect timing really, but you didn't have the courtesy to die as well. I hoped you'd run away with Nott, but you were stupid enough to think that you could have it all. Really Astoria, who do you think you are?"

Hermione couldn't believe what she was hearing. Pansy was completely insane. Her jealousy was completely out of control.

"But I won't make the same mistake again. I will make sure you die this time. The balance destroying hex in the bathroom didn't quite work out as I hoped. You certainly hit your head didn't you? But as it turns out, there is nothing in your head to injury so you just kept on breathing. No, I think a bit of more direct action is needed this time."

Hermione realised that Astoria's fall, the one that killed her had been a deliberate act by Pansy. It had lead to Astoria's body being available at the time she died.

"Everyone knows how unhappy you've been." Pansy said with false sympathy. "And Draco hates you. He deserves so much better than you, and I will be here to make sure he has a shoulder to cry on, or someone to celebrate with more like."

Pansy had no idea what had really happened. She still thought that Astoria had just survived.

"Now I am sorry to do this, but you leave me no choice." Pansy said and floated her body off the ground. "Everyone knows how depressed you've been. Its been obvious to everyone, letting yourself go like you have."

Hermione panicked as she felt herself being lowered into the pond water. Felt herself sinking down into the pond. She struggled against the body bind, but it wouldn't budge. Hermione sank to the bottom of the pond, she must have been at least three meters down. She could see the undulating form of Pansy at the edge of the pond but she stepped away, leaving her there.

Hermione's mind blanked with pure panic, she struggled with all her might, but the body bind didn't give. It would give when she lost consciousness, and there would be no trace of it when she was found.

Hermione's lungs were starting to burn. Her panic was starting to be replaced by a realisation that she may not get out of this one. She was so close to having it all and now it was being taken away. This was not fair. Hermione was overwhelmed by sadness. She had her

baby, but now this was it. She hoped that the baby would join her wherever it was she was going.

She could start to feel unconsciousness start to bite the edges of her mind. Her body was screaming for oxygen, her lungs trying to breath through the closed lips. This was it, the last of a borrowed life.

She thought of Draco and Harry, and the baby until all went blank.

Chapter 23

Chapter 23

Hermione heard some noises. The noises didn't register as making any sense. She didn't mind, she was feeling very comfortable where she was. The noises continued, disturbing the peace she felt.

They were coming closer. She could make out that they were voice.

"Hermione?" Someone was beckoning her. Hermione considered ignoring it. Something shifted in her mind, like the sudden but indefinable shift from deep sleep to light sleep. And the shift brought pain and exhaustion, replacing the nice peace she was enveloped in.

"She's coming to." Someone said.

"Hermione?" A voice said, a familiar voice.

"Open your eyes." She heard another, Draco. He was close, very close. She was happy. The sound of his voice made her happy. How ridiculous was that, she wondered. She'd turned into Lavender Brown.

Hermione opened her eyes to the sight of his grey ones. That was nice, if she could only get rid of the discomfort she felt. She tried to shift to get rid of it, but he hushed her. She focused on him and tried to let go of the pain.

He leaned in and kissed her. Ok, that made the pain go away. He was so warm. Someone cleared their voice, which meant there was someone else in the room. Draco stopped kissing her.

"That is you in there, isn't it?" Draco said in a whisper.

The question confused her, her head felt muddled. She tried to get her mind to co-operated.

"The baby?" She let her thoughts speak directly. Hermione tensed up as she realised that something could be wrong with the baby.

Draco smiled and relaxed. "Its still hanging in there." He said. "Tough little bugger."

"The mediwizard needs to give you some potions." Someone said. Harry. "You need strength."

"Harry?" Hermione tried to turn her head but it was too weak.

"I'm here." He said and walked around the bed into her view.

"It was Pansy." Hermione said. "She did this to me."

"I know." Harry said. "We have her downstairs."

"You found me." Hermione said, focusing her attention on Draco. "I knew you would." Which wasn't exactly true, she hoped he would. Part of her still believed this was all too good

to be true.

He stroked her cheek with the palm of his hand.

"I was worried I'd lost you."

"Master?" An elf voice sounded from somewhere.

"Father is here." Draco said. "I must see to things. I will be back shortly. Be a good girl and take your potions."

Hermione felt the loss of his heat when he moved off the bed. Hermione felt her weakness and the bone shattering cold.

A mediwizard came into view and started talking. Hermione tried to follow, but her mind wasn't able to translate what he was saying to meaning. He was talking too fast, but when he put potions to her lips, she drank it. It took a few minutes, but the potions seemed to relax her a little. It seemed to clear up the cloudiness in her mind a bit too.

"Harry?" She called.

"I'm here Mione." He said and took her hand.

"Pansy tried to kill me." She said.

"I know." Harry said. "We have her restrained downstairs."

Hermione nodded.

"Molly told me something was wrong." Harry continued. "She came to me a while back, a bit distressed because that your hand on her clock was still active. She asked if she could remove it, but I told her to keep it for now and let me know if there was anything noteworthy. She sent me a Patronus when when the clock said you were in trouble. I came right away and found Pansy. She was being evasive so I sent a Patronus for Draco, who came immediately."

"Pansy was saying that she'd come to take you to lunch, but you weren't here." Harry continued. "Draco wasn't having any of it. He practically greeted her with the Cruciatus curse. Then the Imperio. He is disturbingly handy with the unforgivables. I was worried for a minute that he'd go for the full trifecta. He had her lead us to you under the Imperio curse, where we found you in the pond."

"Draco was beside himself. I think he actually cares for you." Harry said. "He kept on chanting something. Chanting this entire time. I don't know what it was, it was no charm I had ever come across before."

"You can't arrest him." Hermione said. "He was just trying to find me."

"I know." Harry said. "I can turn a blind eye considering the circumstances, although if he'd continued, I wouldn't be able to. He was furious. I was really worried that he'd kill her for a second or two. I am pretty sure he was considering it."

Draco came back into the room.

"Father is downstairs. He has contacted the Parkinson's and her husband. Father is recommending that we send her to a sanatorium in Switzerland."

“She needs to be charged.” Harry said.

“That would mean she’d end up in Azkaban.” Draco said.

“She committed a crime.” Harry said.

“Azkaban would destroy her.” Draco said. “She will be restrained and treated in a sanatorium.”

“A nice little retreat in Switzerland then.” Harry said with sarcasm. “Purebloods closing ranks.”

“Nobody deserves Azkaban.” Draco said. “Who is going to gain by her being tortured into complete madness in Azkaban.”

Harry and Draco seemed to be having some kind of staring contest.

“I guess Hermione should have a say, she is after all the wronged party.”

“I don’t care.” Hermione said. “As long as I don’t have to worry about her hiding in the bushes every time I go outside, I don’t care.”

Hermione wasn’t sure she could afford the energy to hate Pansy. If she put Pansy in Azkaban she would have to think about it. If she let Pansy go to the Sanatorium, she felt quite fine about spending none of the energy on the girl ever again. She could be her family’s problem.

“Fine.” Harry said. “I will go, but I will come back and check on you later.” He said and squeezed her hand.

The mediwizard left shortly after, leaving instructions with Draco. As he left, Draco lay down on the bed next to her so they were face to face. He didn’t say anything for a while. Used his fingers to tame some of her more adventurous locks.

“I almost thought I’d lost you.” He said.

“Still here.”

“I don’t know what I would have done if you didn’t come back.” He said. “It wasn’t a possibility I wanted to consider.”

“Harry said you were chanting something.”

“I figured if I would wish you here, then maybe I could keep you here.” He said.

Hermione started to cry. She was just overwhelmed and it was finally catching up to her. Draco pulled her close and she lay there resting against his chest while she cried. Much too much crying lately.

“Nothing like this will happen again.” He said.

She’d almost lost it all. Had it all, then lost it. And now she was back, chance number three.

“You can’t guarantee something like that.”

“I can if I lock you in and let no one near you.”

“Oh there’s a good strategy.” She said and snuggled closer. She knew he was kidding. Maybe the tiniest little bit of uncertainty. “Are there any other unstable ex-girlfriends I need to know about?”

“Sadly, yes.” He said. “Although probably not to the degree that Pansy is. Saying that, I never thought Pansy would go this far.”

“Do you have a thing for unstable girls?”

“Pureblood girls, you have to expect a bit of crazy.” He said.

“Maybe you need to have a hard look at your breeding policies.”

“Sadly, they’ll rather put up with the crazy.” He said. “The pressure they put on you is compelling. And they marry you off before you know any better, before you’re old enough to challenge them.”

Hermione rested her head on his chest.

“And now you’re stuck with a muggleborn in a pureblood wrapper.” She said. “Does that equate to cheating? What if everyone found out?”

He laughed. “I don’t care at this point. All I care about now is that its you and me. Everything else doesn’t matter. I wouldn’t go back to the way things were for the world. Seriously, if Astoria woke up just now instead of you, I really don’t know what I would do with myself.”

“Would you be doing this?” She asked and leaned up to kiss him. She was in charge of the kiss and she used it to languishly explore his mouth. Her fingers snuck in between the buttons of his shirt to feel the warm skin underneath. She pulled them out and went to unbutton the top button, but he took her hand and held it still.

“Now Mrs. Malfoy, you are strictly not allowed any strenuous activity. Doctors orders.” He said. “And if you will not be a good girl and go to sleep, then I am going to have to leave.”

She didn’t want him to leave. She wanted to feel his warmth around her. So she settled her head back down on her chest. She tried to relax, let the peace settle into her weary body and she started to drift off to sleep. She needed him to stay, she needed him to chase any nightmares away, to replace them with sweet, if not naughty thoughts.

Chapter 24

Chapter 24

Hermione recovered quickly from her near death encounter. It was the first one she'd had, not even the fifth and one of them couldn't be described as only near.

Pansy was carted off somewhere and her absence seemed to breathe a bit of life into her elderly husband. However, as far as most people were concerned, nothing had happened and Pansy was off on an extended convalescence abroad for nerves.

No one seemed to kick up much of a buzz and the Parkinsons were overly cordial for a while. Things returned to pretty much normal before long.

Hermione had morning sickness, but she didn't mind the queasiness or the fact that there were certain foods she could even stand the smell of. After a few weeks the queasiness settled a bit and her stomach was getting a bit of a pouch.

She struggled a bit with worry, but also knew that in her bones that things were right. Being with Draco was right and she knew this because she could not see any alternative life that would suit her. And it had survived the 'too good to be true' curse, it had done its worst and she was still here, they were still together and there was nothing they couldn't overcome.

"Are you sure about this Hermione?" Harry said one day when they met in Diagon Alley for a coffee. "It's still so utterly odd, you two being together. A couple."

"I'm sure Harry. I am happy. I just works."

"He's still a complete git, in fact he is worse now than he was. He was alright for a while, now he is reverting back to being an insufferable prick." Harry warned. Hermione could understand because Draco seemed to relish his pointed jibes towards the former golden trio boys, particularly Ron. Hermione suspected that Draco felt he had stolen a treasure away from Ron without Ron even knowing about it.

"It's actually a good thing." Hermione said with a laugh.

"I don't see how Draco Malfoy reverting to type is a good thing." Harry said.

"It beats being the emotionally shut down wreck he was before." Hermione said. "He is returning to his true state."

"But he's an arsehole." Harry stated.

"I can't argue, but I know he is happier." Hermione said.

"Yes well, we were all better off when he was miserable."

"I'm not asking you to be friends Harry." Hermione said. "But I suppose it would mean a lot to me if you could just accept it."

"Molly is pretty suspicious, you know." Harry said.

“Oh?”

“She’s not stupid. She suspects something’s up and your hand is still active on her clock.”

“Maybe its time to remove it.” Hermione said.

“I’m not sure I would be happy with that.” Harry said. “Not just don’t I trust Malfoy, but I really don’t trust Malfoy or anyone in his family. No matter what you say.”

“He would never hurt me. Someone else will eventually notice the clock, Harry.”

“Molly has told everyone it is watching her new cat.” Harry said. “Yes, Hermione the cat. Its the most ungrateful, lazy cat you could ever imagine, its nothing like you.”

Hermione couldn’t help laughing.

“So there you go.” Harry said. “Your legacy.”

“Its not a very good name for a cat.”

“I’m pretty sure it agrees with you.”

They laughed together for a while longer before Hermione had to excuse herself. She couldn’t last through the afternoon without a nap these days. It forced her day into a distinct routine as Draco returned home not long after she woke from her nap. And she felt a little ashamed of her own sappiness, but it was her favourite part of the day.

When he returned from work, they would talk about everything and anything, but increasingly the baby was the topic of conversation.

“Without doubt, this child will be a Slytherin.” Draco said laying his head down in her lap. “There has never been a Malfoy that hasn’t been in Slytherin.”

“You will still have to accept the possibility that it might be a Gryffindor.”

“There would have to be some serious explaining on your part if it is.” Draco said. “Everyone would assume you’ve been less than a dutiful wife. It wouldn’t be the first time paternity drama’s have unfolded as a consequence of the sorting ceremony.”

“Somehow, I don’t think this baby’s heritage will be in question. The Malfoys are pretty easy to spot.” Hermione said. “But it could just as well be a Gryffindor.”

“I will have him in Durmstrang before the hour was out.” Draco said.

“He, or even she for that matter, might love it in Gryffindor house.”

“Absolutely not.” Draco insisted. “That would be a fate too cruel for a Malfoy, surrounded by red haired idiots with nauseating do good complexes and sappy belief in happiness. People would think I didn’t love my child.”

Hermione slapped his around his ear. “Gryffindor is great. This kid would be lucky to get into Gryffindor.”

“The poor thing would be surrounded by Weasleys, they’re practically taking over the world in the numbers.”

“Know knows, this child might even marry a Weasley.”

Draco groaned in agony.

"Maybe even a Weasley, Potter combination." Hermione said with a sly smile. "It looks like Ginny's latest will be in the same year. Maybe they'll be best friends."

"Well that would confirm that the fates hate me." Draco said. "How would I look my family in the eye?"

"Or maybe even a muggleborn. Gryffindor is full of them." That wasn't actually true, but Hermione was enjoying this tease too much to worry about such details.

"Beats a Weasley." He said.

"Really?" Hermione said with genuine surprise.

"Yeah, but it would be a really close call."

Hermione slapped him around the ear again, but he was prepared for her assault and she ended up slapping his arms.

"I'm just grateful it can't be both." He said and that made Hermione pull out the big guns, tickling. A tactical move that balanced on the point that he could not protect his ears and his sides at the same time, which typically ended with him having to take control of the situation, and that was not a bad thing, Hermione had discovered. In fact, it usually ended up quite divine.

A while later, Hermione met up with Draco in Diagon Alley during lunch one day. They were doing a bit of shopping for the baby. Hermione waited for him at the designated meeting point. He was running a bit late, but she would wait.

She saw his hair first, only glimpses of it in the crowd. It was ridiculous how happy she was when she saw him. It just melted her heart every time they were reunited. But she wasn't so far gone that she didn't recognise how ridiculous it was. She was completely in love with Draco Malfoy. Love in its most sappy and ludicrous sense.

She wasn't sure it if was endorphins or serotonin, but something was flooding her brain every time she saw him. The baby seemed to sense a change because it gave a strong couple of kicks.

"Sorry." He said. "But Jamieson seems to want to have a conversation with me every time I want to leave, I'm sure he saves it up for the most inconvenient times."

"Its ok." Hermione said. "You're not that late. I ran into Hannah, and was chatting with her for a while."

"Well, then I'm doubly sorry." Draco said. Hermione chided him as she usually did when he made it apparent that he couldn't have cared less about other people.

"I see your niceness lessons are still to take effect."

"Lost cause, I suspect." He said with his trademark smirk. The smirk she used to hate so much had actually turned into something that made her want to rip his clothes off, she probably would have too if they hadn't been in public.

She still needed to touch him like she needed air, so she grabbed his arm and squeezed into him as he led them down the road.

A pram was on the agenda today. The existing one, which had been Draco's originally was a little too impractical and it would stick out in the muggle world as a complete oddity. Draco couldn't understand, but Hermione still felt like she needed to spend time in the muggle world, keep the connection to the world she grew up in. He didn't argue.

They found the shop that specialised in baby gear and Draco went around to the section that dealt with prams. Males seemed to think prams needed consideration equal to an engineering review.

Hermione wandered around the baby things, studying the small clothes and the tiny shoes. That was where she noticed Molly Weasley looking over some tiny jumpers. She seemed to be trying to make a decision about one of them.

She looked up briefly and returned to her decision.

"Difficult decisions." Hermione said.

"Yes." Molly said absently. "My daughter is having a little girl. But I can't decide on the yellow or the plum colour."

"Harry likes yellow." Hermione said.

Molly seemed to be swayed by the argument, but after a second she looked up with suspicion in her eye.

Hermione gave her a wink and said, "Good Day, Mrs. Weasley."

Hermione could feel Molly's eyes boring into her as she walked away to join Draco who had found a pram he seemed to deem worthy of intense study.

The End

Sequel Link

Unfortunately, the platform won't let me put in her name as is but 4fan_ci has written a sequel to Wrong Life (change underscore to dot) For those of you interested, check it out. [s/10903791/1/Wrong-Wife](https://www.patreon.com/4fan_ci/s/10903791/1/Wrong-Wife). Copy in after main address after dot net slash.

Regards,.

Camille